

# ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

Volume 7, Number 1

Autumn, 1946

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## The Prolapsed World of Jean-Paul Sartre

Back in 1938, before France went under, long before he became the center of the Existentialist movement, and long long even before he was anything more than an obscure high school teacher, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote a novel called *La Nausée*: the title can be translated as "Disgust." I would like to talk of it here as if I had never heard of Existentialism.

Who wouldn't? But the Existentialists have us surrounded. To be perfectly honest, I have read a certain amount about the movement and am thus quite probably contaminated; fortunately I have been able to check my information and impressions by reading the proofs of Jean-Albert Bédé's authoritative note on Sartre in the forthcoming *Columbia Dictionary of Modern Foreign Literature*. What I mean is that I shall leave the reader to interpret *La Nausée* as an Existentialist document as much or as little as he likes.

The book stands by itself, and there is something in it for everybody: philosophers can read it for its philosophical groundwork; psychiatrists will find a long series of clinical notes on a curious emotional state; historians can use it as a document on the temper of pre-war France; and you and I can consider it as a rather expert novel in the traditional sense. It has a hero whose personality is modified during the story, and the extent of the modification is measured against the relative stability of the secondary characters—even though one of the characters has been dead a hundred years and more when the story opens. I am especially interested in it because as a novel of violence it ties up rather closely with the work of several Americans, including Hemingway, Steinbeck, Caldwell and Faulkner, of whose novels Sartre is, as a matter of fact, inordinately fond.

The hero is a negligible little specimen of pre-atomic man with a small but sufficient income, red hair and a homely face, named Antoine Roquentin. He is old enough to have acquired a considerable store of experience and a marked distaste for life. In many ways he sounds like the little man in *A vau-l'eau*, whose inability to struggle against the stream of life is finally reduced to a desperate and unavailing attempt to find a restaurant where he can eat without ruining his digestion, although of course Huysmans is true to his time in summing up his character's unhappiness in an easily understood symbol instead of trying to exhume the underlying neurosis. Roquentin's unhappiness is somewhat less definitive; at least he has loved once, although not very successfully, and he is looking forward to a reunion with the same woman which may prove to him that he is still capable of love. Meanwhile the insipid mediocrity of his existence is shown forth in the way that he has adopted, as an interim substitute for love, an entirely glandular relationship with the proprietress of his favorite café, who interrupts her bedside prattle about the retail liquor business to express the hope that he "won't mind if she keeps her stockings on."

Roquentin is the kind of unhappy individual who contemplates himself in the mirror because, like an anti-Narcissus, he dislikes so much what he sees in the glass. "What I see," he reports, "is considerably beneath the monkey, down on the edge of the vegetable kingdom, on the level of the polyps . . . Close up the eyes are horrible—vitreous, soft, blind, red-edged; you could take them for fish scales." Obviously such a man is what we agree to call abnormal. But let that pass. Novelists in France as well as America have been presenting abnormal types in their books so consistently during the last twenty years that we had better face the fact that, for their purpose at least, abnormality is the rule. What matters is the kind of abnormality and the degree, so far as it can be determined, of departure from whatever norm we can see through all the haze.

Several other symptoms have recently appeared. He is terribly lonely and envies people who move in groups because, as he puts it, "You have to be several men together to be able to bear existence"; he wonders whether it is his lack of friends which makes him feel so naked. Very lately he has had moments when he is absolutely afraid for minutes on end to look at his beer glass on the café table, and is unable during such times to make himself turn his head. He has also been unable to indulge a somewhat anomalous pleasure in picking up pieces of waste paper, clean or filthy, which he has always enjoyed finding in the gutter: lately something has made him withhold his hand. What bothers him even more, as he thinks of it, is another sudden inhibition which prevented him from throwing a pebble into the water; in this instance he has felt the psychic paralysis pass up his arm, as though it had started from the under side of the pebble.

He is aware of these things and they puzzle him. Once before in his life he has experienced a nameless upheaval of his instincts, which then precipitated



his decision—for which he has never been able to think up a rational explanation—to give up a life of travel for one of scholarly retirement in the French coastal city where he now is. He wonders if once more his emotions are preparing to upset his entire way of life.

This is poor Roquentin as the story opens. Suspecting that he is going to get worse, he has started a journal into which he plans to pour his observations on his own condition, for the purpose of bringing the circumstances out into the open; he intends to avoid "making literature," and to put everything down as it comes to the pen, not searching for words. This, of course, is Roquentin's intention, not Sartre's; the latter is very self-consciously literary indeed.

From this point on, Sartre's hero is busy exorcising a devil. His basic trouble is something for which he has no pre-established vocabulary. It lies below the verbal level, and much of his effort is expended in bringing it up to where he can verbalize it. These recurrent attempts at verbalization, interspersed with descriptions of his affective states, form the core of the book.

By the time we have reached page thirty-four, Roquentin's disgust with existence, the *nausée* for which the book is named, is upon him. The first attack is brought on by sexual disappointment: the woman with whom he regularly goes to bed has missed their rendez-vous because of some errands in town. Subsequently, when the crises have become more habitual, it will take progressively less and less to push him over the edge of ordinary consciousness into his private slough of despond: a boresome conversation, the failure of someone to appear at an expected time, the sight of a decrepit or otherwise unfortunate individual, and finally anything at all that stimulates the senses (particularly visual) enough to renew his awareness of one small fact. The fact is small indeed—that he is alive. Let him become aware of his existence and almost nothing can bring him out of the state into which he quickly passes. Almost nothing—yet something always does, in the first attack something as simple as listening to a jazz record, *Some of These Days*.

The nature of the peculiar affective state itself seems to be an overwhelming awareness and sensitivity, and the ability to see the exterior world without the benefit of intervening preconceptions. For an illustration: we speak frequently of seeing things with special kind of eye—as, for instance, the "painter's eye," the "reporter's eye," the "dramatist's" or the "doctor's" or the "moralist's" or the "policeman's" "eye." By the phrase we admit that various individuals build up the habit of looking at the exterior world in ways characteristic of their personal pre-occupations. Let us call such a way a prejudice: they have, so to speak, habitual and probably salutary prejudices which affect their reception of stimuli. If there is anything in the way of psychological truth behind this metaphor at all, it must be extensible to all human beings, each of whom has built up his own prejudiced "eye." Now suppose that through some accident to his nervous system, one of us should momentarily shed these prejudices and see the exterior world not with a poet's or soldier's or iceman's eye, but with an eye *tout court*. Would he not report somewhat as Roquentin reports his sensations when standing, during a moment of such crisis, in a

public park: "Existence had suddenly removed its veil and lost its usual character as an abstract category: it had become the dough out of which things are formed; this root had been kneaded up out of existence . . . or rather, the root, the garden fence, the bench, the rare grass of the lawn, had vanished; the diversity of things, the individuality of things was only an appearance, a varnish over them. The varnish had melted off and there remained masses, soft and disorderly, nude with a frightening and obscene nudity." This sounds a little as if the "buzzing, booming nothing" which psychologists tell us is the essence of a baby's consciousness has suddenly become about all that a perfectly adult and experienced mind can distinguish outside itself; for Roquentin there exists only himself and, exterior to himself, a sort of multi-morphous paste. Sartre's character, in other words, has contrived to have a particularly violent nightmare in the daytime, on his feet, and with his eyes open.

We had better drop this now, while we still can, and leave to the psychiatrist what is properly his.

## 2

Our business, as readers of his novel, is to examine the use Sartre makes of the remarkable instrument he has fashioned. What can he make of it as an artist?

Let us suppose — only for the purpose of seeing better what Sartre is doing — that Erskine Caldwell had somehow managed to see the characters of *Tobacco Road* as Roquentin, in the grip of his own clairvoyance, would see them. It is now impossible for Caldwell to use any of the "eyes" he has the habit of using: he may not see his people as figures in a particularly grotesque comedy, or as subjects for the reporter of the picturesque, or as objects of socially-conscious compassion: his three characteristic prejudices toward his material are out. No prejudice, as we understand the word, may come between him and the harelipped daughter, the dimwit son, the noseless bride and even old Jeeter himself. Now how — how indeed — would they look?

There is a page in *La Nausée* when Sartre makes Roquentin invite the humanity around him to look at itself. The world simply flies apart. Ordinary relationships between things break down. I paraphrase what is too long to quote. A man out walking sees coming toward him on the other side of the street a red rag, blown by the wind, which turns out to be a quarter of rotten meat, dust-spotted, dragging itself along the gutter and spasmodically spouting blood. A mother examines what seems to be a pimple on her child's cheek, sees the flesh swell, split, open up and a third eye appear. Others feel their clothes become living things. One man feels something scratching in his mouth and learns from the mirror that his tongue has become an enormous earwig, a part of himself which he has to tear out with his hands.

And he who has gone to sleep in his own good bed in the pleasant warmth of his own room, will awaken naked on the bluish earth, in a forest of rustling phalli, red and white and erected toward the sky like the smokestacks of Juxte-bouville, with great culls half buried in the earth, hairy and bulbous, like



onions. And the birds will flutter about the phalli and pick at them with their beaks and they will bleed. Sperm will run slowly and quietly from the wounds, sperm mixed with gluey, warm blood with little bubbles in it.

Enough of this. The literary end-product of Sartre-Roquentin's view of the exterior world is apparent: it eventuates here in the violent vision which we identify crudely as surrealist. Nothing in this passage is respendently new: the crawling, blood-spurting meat, the third eye, the live clothing, the earwig, are perfectly familiar in recent painting. The obscene forest with the flying figures was useful to Virgil and old stuff to Dante.

Working with words on paper instead of charcoal and paint, the technique consists of juxtaposing image-elements which are perfectly plausible to the imagination, but make the reason recoil because we know that the juxtaposition would be possible only if the world with which we are in contact were suddenly to disintegrate.

But what a difference between the mood of this and the sort of crazy playfulness which is so common to the surrealists. Part of the surrealist mood was of course pure snobbishness. This was the one revenge possible against the man of the nineteen-twenties who was master of all things because he could buy them. The artist could at least paint what he wanted to and then sell the painting, without enabling the rich man to purchase the understanding of the paint-on-canvas that he took home. This was perhaps the last phase in the long battle between the esthete and the bourgeois: intricate, wilful mystification. Now the technique of mystification here consists of hiding the intention of the artist. As a formula there is much to be said for it (so long as one does not apply it also to conduct, in which case it leads to the psychiatric ward), for if you paint a woman's torso with a crab in place of the umbilicus you may double your delight by telling the purchaser that you paint this way because you *feel* this way and then behaving as though he should be satisfied with this explanation. The reason that Sartre can use the vision-method of the surrealists without surrounding himself with an atmosphere of mystification is that he is not in the least hiding his intention, just as there is no mystification around Dante when he produces the violent metamorphosis of men and snakes. Such a thing is appropriate in hell — and what is appropriate in hell is appropriate in Sartre's world.

I have previously remarked that Roquentin lacks a vocabulary for bringing his trouble completely up to the verbal level. What he does instead, of course, is to resort to an imagery not unlike that of the symbolists in intention, since the aim of both is to evoke a mood. (The difference is in the mood evoked.) For the process of plausible-but-not-possible association of terms in a metaphor, illustrated above at the height of its power to shock, persists at a lower degree of tension through the book. I quote another simply to show how insidiously such metaphors can be slipped into the reader's consciousness: a sun which shines "with a reasonable and avaricious light, like the look one casts after a sleepless night over the decisions made in enthusiasm the day before." This is only one; a student of such things could find dozens.



Sartre is using them, it is hardly necessary to say, to undermine our confidence in what is conventionally called reality. It crumbles under Roquentin at nearly every step. I am not sure that the total symbolic effect does not amount to a mass murder of the race. Certainly for Roquentin, when under the sway of his nausea, certain common ideas about humanity have to be radically revised. The philosopher, for whom I have said that I am not specifically writing, may see this as a new attack on the position of realism.

In the continuation of the particularly violent passage which has been quoted, Roquentin gives us the key to the readjustment. "Where then," he screams after the sufferers who have realized their plight, "where is your thinking reed, now?" I doubt that there is much profit in developing the association of the thinking reed with the rustling phalli of the passage, even though it should not go unobserved, but it is definitely necessary to keep in mind the general tenor of the thought of Pascal—Pascal not only sees the hope of man in the fact that while he is a reed, the feeblest thing in nature, he is a reed that thinks; he also points out that the human mind, that magnificent creation, can be rendered unserviceable by the buzzing of a fly. Man has thus a tenuous hold indeed on salvation. Roquentin would add that the feat of the fly is not at all stupendous. In the last of his life, Pascal lived with the hallucination of a great pit yawning beside him. Roquentin accepts the pit and rejects Pascal.

## 3

This is only one of an important series of rejections.

Most interestingly, Roquentin rejects as meaningless the central core of the teaching of André Gide. What happens to Roquentin may even be read as a specific and formal reply to Gide, although Gide's name is not mentioned. For Gide, as we most often think of him—he is many other things besides and this is not an effort to belittle him—is the apostle of self-culture through experience, of personal growth through exposure to the possibility of having things happen to you, of adventure in short. But Roquentin, who has been everywhere from London to Saigon until references to his past sound like a somewhat comic version of a Cook's advertisement, has come to the conclusion that experience does not exist except as a word. The lover of adventure in the story is a pitifully unattractive creature whom Roquentin to himself calls the *Autodidacte*, who is educating himself by reading his way through the library and after seven years has gotten through the alphabet as far as "L". He also composes maxims in a notebook and thinks that care in writing prose means avoiding inadvertent Alexandrines. This unfortunate would give his soul to have any adventure at all: "lose one's purse, miss a train, spend a night in jail." When he tries to buttonhole Roquentin on the subject, the latter sends him away delighted with a pocketful of postcard views from here and there, and the thought that travel is really-truly broadening. For Roquentin adventure is nothing but an attitude. "You used to kid yourself," he thinks, "with words. What you called adventure was the rattletrap of travel, love



affairs with whores, street fights, dime-store stuff . . ." Experience means nothing; something happens to you; for a time you remember the thing and then gradually you replace the thing by a word and after a while you have the word and nothing else. "My memories are like coins in the devil's purse; when you open it you find nothing but dead leaves." So much for Gide. The chance of growth through experience is in this case paltry indeed.

So also with history. At the beginning of the book Roquentin is still working on the life of an eighteenth-century adventurer named Rollebon, his own psychological antithesis. Rollebon, in spite of a physical ugliness as great as Roquentin's, had managed to contrive a life of constant action for himself. He had been greatly successful with beautiful and aristocratic women. The cold, practical, calculating wretch had passed through the best beds of France on his way eventually to conspiracy against the Czar and thence to virtual exile in Asia. On one occasion, when a priest had failed to bring a notorious freethinker to death-bed repentance, Rollebon won a bet from the priest by bringing the man to proper sentiments in two hours, not by Christian persuasion but simply, as he said, "by talking the fear of hell into him." He is so clearly Roquentin's opposite that for a while writing a book about Rollebon has been a delightful task, but now, as the biography is moving toward its end, the job has begun to pall. Rollebon strikes him less as a hero and more as a "vapid little liar." One of the reference points which permit us to measure the alteration in Roquentin's personality as the novel progresses is his increasing lack of stomach for Rollebon. He comes at length to the point of inability to imagine his man at all, has no confidence in his own data and conclusions, and abandons the study entirely. Experience and adventure have again turned out to be meaningless; the sense of the past is an illusion.

Much of the hope of the present is illusion also. There is no hope whatever of his being able to lose his loneliness by resorting to what he sees as the refuge of the bourgeois: the assumption of social responsibility. One afternoon he visits the local museum and contemplates at great length the collection of portraits which commemorate the builders of the municipality, the heads of powerful families, directors of flourishing businesses, partisans of success, prosperity and order. He knows their story, having studied the history of the town, and they offend him esthetically. What stuffed shirts! "I had gone the whole length of the gallery. Now I turned back. Farewell, beautiful lilies, delicate in your painted sanctuaries. Farewell, beautiful lilies, our pride, our reason for being. Farewell . . . you lice." And he is at the same time too honest to accept the Great Compromise. For him the bell-wether intellectuals of the bourgeoisie, symbolized for him in the portrait of a distinguished professor of medicine native to the place, are nothing but hypocrites: they have traded on a falsely acquired reputation as revolutionaries to win disgusted young men back to the ways of right thinking and of the established order. They are men like Renan, Melchior de Vogüé, Paul Desjardins, who have been tolerated by the bourgeoisie because nothing about them does anything but confirm the supremacy of the middle class.



But this does not mean that Roquentin places any hope in Revolution, whether of the Right or of the Left. There is no part of humanity which looks in any way lovable to him. Once the *Autodidacte*, having invited Roquentin to dinner, confides to Roquentin that he is a socialist and a humanitarian — he simply loves humanity. Immediately through Roquentin's head there runs a long list of humanitarian types: the middle-of-the-road "Radical," the Leftist, the Communist, the Catholic, the humanitarian who loves man as he is, the humanitarian who loves him as he ought to be, etc. When he tries to explain to the *Autodidacte* that such things are not for him, both of them are baffled, one because he can not comprehend how anyone can fail to feel such love and the other by the frustrating knowledge that his efforts to communicate his feelings can get absolutely nowhere. The total effect is to throw Roquentin into a particularly painful fit of his characteristic nausea.

Significantly, the *Autodidacte*, who personifies so much of what Roquentin rejects, comes to a sad end. Just before the finish of the book a schoolboy who has wandered into the library tempts humanity's lover into making a tentative homosexual gesture. For it he is beaten by the librarian and driven from the library in disgrace. With him the thirst for knowledge, desire for human betterment, respect for experience, and Gidian love of adventure which he incarnates, exit from the story.

One other of these rejections is especially significant because it helps identify Roquentin's peculiar state. "I began to laugh," says Roquentin, "because all of a sudden I thought of the redoubtable springtimes that are described in certain books, full of cracklings and gigantic buddings and explosive leafings-out. There were imbeciles who talked to you about the will to power and the struggle for life . . . It's not possible to see things under any such guise." Now the reference here is too pat not to be aimed at the work of Jean Giono, who, like Sartre, rejects much of modern life but, unlike him, takes refuge in a vision of nature—and of life in harmony with the ways of nature—compounded, as those who have read *Joy of Man's Desiring* already know, of Thoreau, Walt Whitman and Melville in about equal doses. Roquentin's words sound rather like a distant echo of Baudelaire's famous dismissal of nature with the declaration that he was incapable of bowing down before a lot of vegetables. I would not care to argue here for too close an identity of attitude because, among other reasons, Baudelaire reached his conclusion through self-contemplation, whereas Sartre seems to have reached his through contemplation of the world outside him, but the question is still worth asking: is not Roquentin's state of nausea very close to what Baudelaire meant by *ennui*? At least, Sartre does not, among all these rejections, specifically reject Baudelaire.

Meanwhile, what makes this a novel?

The fable—Roquentin's story—follows a mind as it progresses in the discovery of the nature of reality, which is another way of saying progress



through constantly intensified affective states. On the plane of personal relationships, it is the account of the narrator's contacts in his recurrent meetings with Rollebon, the *Autodidacte*, the mistress pro tempore, the restaurant proprietor and other minor characters, up to the point where he is ready to put them all out of his life. It is also the story of a man who is moving toward a reunion with the woman he loved once and may possibly love again, who realizes that in the interim he is undergoing psychic experiences which must certainly change his character, and who expects some sort of conclusively revealing emotional experience at the meeting. The interview between this man and this woman will thus stand as the dramatic climax of the piece.

We know of Anny mainly that at one point in his life her stronger personality has thoroughly dominated Roquentin. He remembers her as a creature with the imperious ways and strange whims of a professional actress (which she is), such, for instance, as her insistence on decorating her hotel room even when she is determined to stay there no longer than the night. She has written him that she will be in his town on such and such a date, and expects him to come to her. All that Roquentin may expect and hope of the meeting is never clear; what the reader hopes for is an insight into Roquentin's character when the new contact with Anny brings home the difference between Roquentin then and Roquentin now.

But when Roquentin walks into Anny's room, he finds that she has sent for him because she needs him for this same psychological reason: she has changed and wants him near her for a moment because she is sure that he has remained unaltered. Her body is heavier; she no longer sets up her personal backdrop of room decorations; she tells him that she has given up the little "tragedies" in which she had once delighted and in which she had assigned him a role, and which had always resulted in the assertion of her will over his. She expects never to love again: she is, at present, being kept by an Englishman who means nothing to her and need mean nothing to Roquentin. The latter senses in the atmosphere around her some sort of despair and decides, somewhat against his will, not to tell her about the changes in himself. But she explains to him, as well as she can, what has happened: she has lost the feeling, around which her life had apparently been built, that there are times in one's life which are especially poignant and meaningful and heightened and emotionally tense—what she calls *moments parfaits* and *situations privilégiées*. The professional *actrice* has learned that drama does not exist. The artist has learned that there is nothing in her art! Shortly she sends Roquentin away, the final parting, and her face as he leaves is the face of an old woman.

"The past is dead," Roquentin thinks, "Rollebon is dead. Anny turned up only to take away my last hope. I am alone in this white, garden-bordered street. Alone and free." His life is over, although he knows that he will survive himself and go on living out of sheer habit. Suicide is impossible, since it is as meaningless as life. For some perverse reason he begins to cheer up at the thought of leaving this place, and this chapter, forever.



The cheerful mood does not last, because the scene in which the *Autodidacte's* homosexuality is revealed intervenes and throws Roquentin back in the mood of disgust. He has been cheered by the thought of leaving this town and going to Paris. Now he discovers that the town has already deserted *him*; the lady from the café, for example, is sleeping with someone else already. He then suddenly realizes that he no more wants to go than he does to stay. The feeling of loneliness *and* freedom has departed. He wants to do nothing whatsoever. "I know very well that I want to do nothing; to do something is to create existence. There is certainly enough existence without my doing that." And the book would leave him in that state if he did not wander into his café and listen once more to the record of *Some of These Days*. As before, the music lightens his mood. He thinks that perhaps, after all, if someone could create something like that tin-pan alley song, his life might not be unbearable. And we leave him with that thought.

Judging it first by the main impression which remains after the first reading, *La Nausée* is first of all a book in dispraise of life, after the manner of Céline. But it lacks Céline's essential bitterness and the anthropomorphism which gains expression through Céline's obscenity, for existence can be obscene only if man stays at the center of it. A large part of Roquentin's trouble is that existence has no place for him. "And here is the meaning of his existence: it is the consciousness of being *de trop*, in excess." He also feels a certain compassion occasionally, whereas Céline's people are swimming in misanthropy. What he does have most patently in common with Céline is violence.

I have quoted in this paper the page of *La Nausée* at which Sartre's violence reaches its climax; it will be noted that the violence is symbolic. Sartre's character comes to a moment when nothing will quiet him but a vision which simply tears apart the world men live in, a vision which condemns men either to suicide or insanity. I think that its impact on the reader is greatly impaired by its being so palpably literary—by the obviousness of the sources of the elements in the formula—but this is a comment on its success, not its nature or its intention. Sartre's character expresses himself, when the tension is greatest, through, I repeat, an act of violence.

It is possible to characterize so many novels in our time by this phrase that I have a growing conviction that we have here the central trait which marks most of the major novelists who wrote between the two world wars. I have named Céline and the connection is obvious; the statement fits Malraux equally well. The same judgment can be made of the four Americans named in the introduction to this paper. Within reason, of course: Sartre's violence is cerebral; it does not produce the rapid tale eventuating in a scene of physical brutality which so often appears in American fiction. But the same immediacy of sensation is immediately present in the Frenchman and in the Americans and it is equally true of both that the immediate sensation outruns the intelligence of the character; his intelligence is not equal to it—the main difference being that in Sartre's character there is more intelligence and the flood of sensation has a harder job. I do not feel particularly extravagant in suggesting



that there is legitimate kinship at this point between *La Nausée* and *Death in the Afternoon*.

It would be possible to enmesh in the same web of implications this insistence on the immediacy of sensations with the Sartre-Roquentin attitude toward the past and the value of experience and adventure. Roquentin denies the value of adventure only when it has moved into the past tense. With adventure as a present source of sensation he has no quarrel. The point of focus in the novel is the dividing line where the things of the future become present. Such material as Roquentin gives the reader about the past, for instance his relationship with Anny, is what is necessary to understanding the advancing-present and is presented not as a narration of the events as they happened but as a lump of the past which is again impinging on Roquentin's consciousness in the present; they have the indefiniteness and distortion which clearly establishes this value. I mention this aspect of the novel here although it is out of place—since it leads fatally to a comparison of the usage of time by most of the interesting novelists who have written since 1910 or maybe since Flaubert—simply because it identifies the interest which Sartre displayed, at the time he was writing *La Nausée*, in William Faulkner. What fascinated him with Faulkner was precisely Faulkner's technique of mixing past and present through his familiar unannounced psychological flashbacks until for the reader the past exists only as an aspect of the present consciousness.

What really baffles me here is a rhetorical problem. If I had already published on the American novelists in question the proper basic discussion, which would have emphasized the appropriate aspects of their work, a referential technique would permit of explicitly detailed illustration. But otherwise it is impossible to put the matter of a book within the limits of an article. I am thus forced to take recourse to the expedient of inviting the reader to accept certain propositions as subjects for his own further meditation.

Thus, in place of a conclusion, here is an enumeration.

Do not the American and French novelists have in common the following characteristics? That the exterior world they see is, in one way or another, inadequate to the expectations of the human mind and thus one essentially of horror. That the immediacy of this vision is such that the intelligence of the characters is overwhelmed by it. That because of this immediacy the time plan of the novels tends always to emphasize the present. That this emphasis of the present tends to replace the older, time's-revenges sort of novel by one which is not lyrical-nostalgic in final effect but dramatic. That this naturally leads to an esthetic of the novel which places an increased value on success in effecting an impact on the reader, that is, on producing shock. That this in turn explains why so often the formula of a novel involves placing a character in a situation from which he may emerge only through one or more acts of some kind of violence. That this violence is particularly in harmony with the mood of violence which swept the world between the two world wars.

All this may make it seem that we have moved a long way from Jean-Paul Sartre, but I would argue that a consideration of Sartre makes these other considerations inevitable.

# BERTOLT BRECHT:

## Two Plays

Translated by Gerhard Nellhaus

### Translator's Note

If we could use the German words *Einfühlung* and *Einverständnis*, it would be much simpler to explain "epic theatre" as propounded by the German playwright Bertolt Brecht. For *Einfühlung* means to feel one's way into the emotions of others. Applied to the theatre, it is a process of sympathy, of vicarious experience if you like, wherein the spectator identifies himself with a stage character. It is the Aristotelian concept of "producing the wonderful" in order to "effect a catharsis of the emotions." But *Einverständnis* means agreement, understanding and its root *Verstand* means the conscious mind, the intellect. It indicates analysis and understanding of a problem before agreeing to its implications; *Einverständnis* is at the bottom of thought and learning. When Brecht says, therefore, that epic theatre is non-Aristotelian, he is opposing *Einverständnis* to *Einfühlung*. One term does not necessarily exclude the other, but for Brecht the emphasis is on thought over feeling, learning over amusement.

After an initial period of brilliant, satirical but rather aimless writings in the early twenties, Brecht took up the study of Marxian dialectics and regularly attended the lectures of the "Society for Empirical Philosophy" in Berlin. He had been making a thorough study of the Greek, Elizabethan, Chinese and Japanese theatres, and now he borrowed from them to develop his "non-illusory" technique for the epic theatre. Non-illusion is the term used by Brecht to denote the dispelling of *Einfühlung*, to prevent sympathy; non-illusion is to give his plays greater clarity and to create distance in order to enhance *Einverständnis* or critical thought.

It was during this period in the late twenties that Brecht wrote his didactic pieces, *Lehrstücke* as they are called in German, to which "He Who Says Yes" and "He Who Says No" belong. They are outstandingly useful in our attempt to learn what epic theatre is.

Brecht followed closely the little Japanese No play "Taniko" in its English translation by Arthur Waley. Here a boy joins his teacher and a group of pilgrims on a "ritual mountain-climbing" to pray for his sick mother. Unable to go on, he is hurled into the valley as the ancient custom demands.

But in "He Who Says Yes", the small expedition is seeking medicine and advice to stop an epidemic affecting an entire community. It is for this reason that the boy must be left behind when he is unable to go on. But note, not only is an attempt made to save him, but his death is of his own choosing in recognition of "necessity", the bitter but inexorable law of the world.

In "He Who Says No," however, the boy only joined a research expedition and his mother, for whom he wishes to get medicine, is no longer critically ill. There is then no "necessity" for his death. Analyze, so Brecht explains, each situation for its own laws and then draw the necessary conclusions.

After these pieces were enacted by and played before students of the Karl Marx School in New-Cologne, discussion followed. Boys in the lower grades as well as young men in special courses for workers argued about the problems of "necessity" and "the individual vs. society." They stressed that every effort should be made to save the boy, and that he should choose death consciously and only after clearly recognizing its necessity. As the plays indicate, Brecht made good use of these suggestions. Like any good teacher, it is not his purpose to drum ideas into his students, but to help them learn to think.



In view of this, it is well, perhaps, to venture on a definition of the epic theatre (paraphrasing Aristotle's dictum): The Epic Theatre is the presentation of the dialectics of human affairs, by men acting and the use of other theatrical devices in a non-illusory manner, stimulating the spectator to view society and the individual therein critically.

## He Who Says Yes

### I

GREAT CHORUS:

Above all, learn to agree!  
Many say yes without agreement.  
Many are not asked, and many  
Agree to falsehoods. Therefore:  
Above all learn to agree!

(The Teacher is now in Room 1, the Mother and the Boy in Room 2.)

TEACHER: I am the teacher. I teach school in the city and I have a student whose father is dead. He has only his mother and she takes care of him. I want to go and say goodbye to them now, because in a little while I'm taking a trip over the mountains. An epidemic has broken out among us and in the city beyond the mountains live some famous doctors. (He knocks at the door) May I come in?

BOY (stepping from Room 2 into Room 1): Who is it? Oh, the teacher, the teacher's come to visit us!

TEACHER: Why haven't you been to school for so long?

BOY: I couldn't come because Mother was sick.

TEACHER: I didn't know that your mother, too, is ill. Please tell her right away that I'm here.

BOY (calling into Room 2): Mother, teacher is here.

MOTHER (sitting in Room 2): Tell him to come in, please.

BOY: Please come in.

(They both enter Room 2).

TEACHER: I haven't been here for a long time. Your son tells me that you have caught the sickness, too. Are you feeling better now?

MOTHER: Unfortunately I'm not getting better since nobody yet knows how to treat this sickness.

TEACHER: Something must be found. That's why I came to say goodbye: tomorrow I'm starting out on a trip over the mountains to get medicine and advice. For in the city beyond the mountains live the famous doctors.

MOTHER: A relief expedition over the mountains! Yes, indeed, I've heard that the famous doctors live there, but I've also heard that the trip is dangerous. Maybe you want to take my child along?

TEACHER: That's no trip for a child!

MOTHER: Glad of that. I hope you get back all right.

TEACHER: I have to go now. Goodbye. Get well. (Exit into Room 1).

BOY (follows the teacher into Room 1): I have something to say.

(Mother listens at the door.)

TEACHER: What do you want to say?

BOY: I want to go over the mountains with you.

TEACHER:

As I've already told your mother  
The trip is hard and dangerous.  
You won't be able to come along. Besides:  
How can you want to leave your mother  
When she is so ill?  
Stay here. It's really impossible  
For you to come along.

BOY:

It's just because Mother is sick  
That I want to come with you;  
I must get her  
Medicine and advice  
From the famous doctors in the city beyond the mountains.

TEACHER: I have to talk to your mother once again. (He returns to Room 1) (The boy listens at the door.) I've come back once more. Your son tells me that he wants to come with us. I told him that he couldn't leave you while you're ill; and also that it is a hard and dangerous trip. It would be quite impossible for him to come along, I said. But he said that he had to come with us to the city beyond the mountains to get medicine and advice for you.

MOTHER: I heard what he said. I know the boy means well and would like to make the dangerous trip with you. Come in, Son.

(The boy enters Room 2.)

Ever since  
Your father left us  
I've had no one  
But you at my side.  
You were never longer  
Out of my mind and out of my sight  
Than it took  
To prepare your meals  
To fix your clothes and  
To earn a living.

BOY: It's all as you say. But still you can't get me to change my mind.

BOY, MOTHER, TEACHER:

I am going (he is going) to make the dangerous trip  
To get for you (my, her) illness  
Medicine and advice  
In the city beyond the mountains.



## GREAT CHORUS:

You saw that no argument  
 Could move him.  
 Then said the teacher and the mother  
 In one voice:

## TEACHER AND MOTHER:

Many agree to falsehoods  
 But he does not agree to illness  
 But that illness be healed.

## GREAT CHORUS:

But the mother said:

## MOTHER:

I have no more strength.  
 If it has to be  
 Go with the teacher.  
 But hurry, hurry  
 Get back from the danger.

## II

## GREAT CHORUS:

The people have started  
 On the trip over the mountains.  
 Among them the teacher  
 And the boy.  
 The boy was not equal to the strain:  
 He overworked his heart  
 In their hurry to return.  
 At dawn by the foot of the mountains  
 He could hardly drag  
 Himself on.

(Into Room 1 enter the teacher, three students, and finally the boy with a jug).

TEACHER: We climbed rapidly. There is the first hut. Let's rest there awhile.

THE THREE STUDENTS: We obey.

(They step on the raised platform in Room 2. The boy holds the teacher back.)

BOY: I have something to say.

TEACHER: What do you want to say?

BOY: I don't feel well.

TEACHER: Stop. People who undertake such a trip must not say such things. Perhaps you're tired because you aren't used to climbing. Stop and rest a bit. (He steps on the platform).

3 STUDENTS: It seems that the boy is tired from climbing. Let's ask the teacher.

GREAT CHORUS: Yes, do that.

3 STUDENTS: (to the teacher) We hear that the boy is tired from climbing.

What's the matter with him? Are you worried about him?

TEACHER: He doesn't feel well, but otherwise he is all right. He is tired from climbing.

3 STUDENTS: Then you aren't worried about him? (Long pause, then the students among one another)

Do you hear? The teacher said

The boy is only tired from climbing.

But doesn't he look strange?

Right after the hut comes the narrow pass.

Only clutching the cliff

With both hands

Can you pass.

Let's hope he is not sick.

For if he can't go on, we must

Leave him here.

(They call down to Room 1, forming a megaphone with their hands:)

Are you sick? — He doesn't answer. — Let's ask the teacher again. (to the teacher) When we asked you before about the boy you said he was only tired from climbing, but now he looks so strange. He even sat down.

TEACHER: I see that he's gotten sick. Try to carry him over the narrow pass.

3 STUDENTS: We'll try it.

(The 3 students try to carry the boy over the narrow pass. This narrow pass must be so constructed by the students that the 3 students can pass, but not with the boy. Desks, chairs, ropes, etc., can be used to build the "narrow pass".)

We can't carry him over and we can't stay with him. In any case, we have to go on for a whole city is waiting for the medicine which we are supposed to bring back. We dread to say it, but if he can't go on with us we'll just have to leave him here in the mountains.

TEACHER: Yes, maybe you'll have to. I can't disagree with you. But I believe that we should ask the sick one whether we should turn around for his sake. There is deep sorrow in my heart for this creature. I'll go and break his fate to him gently.

3 STUDENTS: Please, do. (They face each other.)

3 STUDENTS AND GREAT CHORUS:

We'll ask him (They asked him) whether he demands

That we turn around for his sake.

But even if he demands it

We will (they would) not turn back

But leave him here and go on.

TEACHER: (has gone down to the boy in Room 1) Listen closely. Since you're sick and can't go on we must leave you here. But it is only right to ask the one who is sick whether we should turn around for his



sake. And the custom demands also that the sick person answer: you shall not turn back.

BOY: I understand.

TEACHER: Do you ask that we turn back for your sake?

BOY: You shall not turn back.

TEACHER: Then you agree to stay behind?

BOY: I'll think about it. (Pause of reflection) Yes, I agree.

TEACHER (calls from Room 1 into Room 2): He answered as necessity demanded.

GREAT CHORUS AND 3 STUDENTS: (the latter are going down to Room 1) He said yes. Go on! (3 Students stand still)

TEACHER:

Go on now, don't stop

For you've decided to move on.

(The three students stand still).

BOY: I want to say something: I ask you not to let me lie here but to throw me into the valley, for I'm afraid to die alone.

3 STUDENTS: We can't do that.

BOY: Stop. I demand it.

TEACHER:

You've decided to move on and to leave him here.

It's easy to decide his fate

But hard to carry it out.

Are you ready to throw him into the valley?

3 STUDENTS: Yes. (the 3 students carry the boy to the platform in Room 2.)

Lean your head on our arms.

Don't strain yourself

We'll carry you carefully.

(The 3 Students stand in front of the boy, hiding him, on the furthest edge of the platform.)

BOY (not visible):

I knew that on this trip

I might lose my life.

The thought of my mother

Tempted me to go.

Take my jug

Fill it with the medicine

And bring it to my mother

When you come back.

GREAT CHORUS:

Then the friends took the jug

And bewailed the sad ways of the world

And its bitter law,

And threw the boy down.

Shoulder on shoulder they pressed together

At the edge of the abyss  
 And closing their eyes they hurled him down.  
 No one guiltier than his neighbor  
 And they threw clumps of earth  
 And flat stones  
 After him.

## He Who Says No

### I

GREAT CHORUS:

Above all, learn to agree!  
 Many say yes without agreement.  
 Many are not asked, and many  
 Agree to falsehoods. Therefore:  
 Above all, learn to agree!

(The teacher is now in Room 1, the mother and the boy in Room 2.)

TEACHER: I am the teacher. I teach school in the city and I have a student whose father is dead. He has only his mother and she takes care of him. I want to go and say goodbye to them now, because in a little while I'm taking a trip over the mountains.

(He knocks at the door) May I come in?

BOY (stepping from Room 2 into Room 1): Who is it? Oh, the teacher, the teacher's come to visit us!

TEACHER: Why haven't you been to school for so long?

BOY: I couldn't come because Mother was sick.

TEACHER: I didn't know that. Please, tell her right away that I am here.

BOY (calling into Room 2): Mother, teacher is here.

MOTHER (sitting on a wooden stool in Room 2): Ask him please to come in.

BOY: Please come in.

(They both enter Room 2)

TEACHER: I haven't been here for a long time. Your son tells me you've been sick. Are you feeling better now?

MOTHER: Don't worry about my illness. It had no bad effects.

TEACHER: I'm glad to hear it. I came to say goodbye to you because I'm going on a research trip over the mountains soon. For in the city beyond the mountains live the famous teachers.

MOTHER: A research trip over the mountains! Yes, indeed, I've heard that the famous doctors live there, but I've also heard that the trip is dangerous? Maybe you want to take my child along?

TEACHER: That's no trip for a child!

MOTHER: Glad of that. I hope you get back all right.

TEACHER: I have to go now. Goodbye. Get well. (Exit into Room 1.)

BOY: (follows the teacher into Room 1) I have something to say.



(Mother listens at the door.)

TEACHER: What do you want to say?

BOY: I want to go over the mountains with you.

TEACHER:

As I've already told your mother

The trip is hard and dangerous.

You won't be able to come along. Besides:

How can you want to leave your mother

When she is ill?

Stay here. It's really impossible

For you to come along.

BOY:

It's just because Mother is sick

That I want to come with you;

I must get her

Medicine and advice

From the famous doctors in the city beyond the mountains.

TEACHER: But would you agree to everything that might happen to you on the trip?

BOY: Yes.

TEACHER: I have to talk to your mother once again. (He returns to Room 1)

(The boy listens at the door) I've come back once more. Your son tells me that he wants to come with us. I told him that he couldn't leave you while you're still ill; and also that it is a hard and dangerous trip. It would be quite impossible for him to come along, I said. But he said that he had to come along to the city beyond the mountains to get medicine and advice for you.

MOTHER: I heard what he said. I know the boy means well and would like to make the dangerous trip with you. Come in, Son.

(The boy enters Room 2.)

Ever since

Your father left us

I've had no one

But you at my side.

You were never longer

Out of my mind and out of my sight

Than it took

To prepare your meals

To fix your clothes and

To earn a living.

BOY: It's all as you say. But still you can't get me to change my mind.

BOY, MOTHER, TEACHER:

I am going (he is going) to make the dangerous trip

To get for your (my, her) illness

Medicine and advice

In the city beyond the mountains.

GREAT CHORUS:

You saw that no argument

Could move him.

Then said the teacher and the mother

In one voice:

TEACHER AND MOTHER:

Many agree to falsehoods

But he does not agree to illness

But that illness be healed.

GREAT CHORUS:

But the mother said:

MOTHER:

I have no more strength.

If it has to be

Go with the teacher.

But hurry, hurry

Get back from the danger.

## II

GREAT CHORUS:

The people have started

On the trip over the mountains

Among them the teacher

And the boy.

The boy was not equal to the strain:

He overworked his heart

In their hurry to return home.

At dawn by the foot of the mountains

He could hardly drag

Himself on.

(Into Room 1 enter the teacher, 3 students, and finally the boy with a jug).

TEACHER: We climbed rapidly. There is the first hut. Let's rest there a while.

3 STUDENTS: We obey.

(They step on the raised platform in Room 2. The boy holds the teacher back.)

BOY: I have something to say.

TEACHER: What do you want to say?

BOY: I don't feel well.

TEACHER: Stop. People who undertake such a trip must not say such things. Perhaps you're tired because you aren't used to climbing. Stop and rest a bit. (He steps on the platform).

3 STUDENTS: It seems that the boy is tired from climbing. Let's ask the teacher?



GREAT CHORUS: Yes, do that.

3 STUDENTS: (to the teacher) We hear that the boy is tired from climbing.  
What's the matter with him? Are you worried about him?

TEACHER: He doesn't feel well, but otherwise, he is all right. He is tired from climbing.

3 STUDENTS: Then you aren't worried about him? (Long pause, then the students among one another)

Do you hear? The teacher said

The boy is only tired from climbing.

But doesn't he look strange?

Right after the hut comes the narrow pass.

Only clutching the cliff

With both hands

Can you pass.

We can't carry anyone.

Should we follow the great custom

And hurl him into the valley?

(They call down to Room 1, forming a megaphone with their hands)

Are you sick from climbing?

BOY:

No!

See, I'm still standing up.

Wouldn't I sit down

If I were sick?

(Pause. The boy sits down.)

3 STUDENTS: We'll tell the teacher. Sir, when we asked you before about the boy you said he was only tired from climbing, but now he looks so strange. He's even sat down. We dread to say it, but since ancient times a great custom has ruled here: those who can go no further are hurled into the valley?

TEACHER: What, you want to throw this child into the valley?

3 STUDENTS: Yes, we do!

TEACHER: That is a great custom. I can't set myself against it. But the great custom also demands that we should ask the sick one whether we should turn around for his sake. There is deep sorrow in my heart for this creature. I'll go and gently tell him of the great custom.

3 STUDENTS: Please, do. (They face each other.)

3 STUDENTS AND GREAT CHORUS:

We'll ask him (They asked him) whether he demands

That we turn around for his sake.

But even if he demands it

We will (they would) not turn back

But hurl him into the valley.

TEACHER: (has gone down to the boy in Room 1) Listen closely. Since ancient times a law has ruled that he who falls ill on such a trip must be

thrown into the valley. Death is instant. But the custom also demands that we should ask the sick person whether we should turn back for his sake. And the custom demands also that the sick person answer: You shall not turn back. If I could take your place, how gladly I would die.

BOY: I understand.

TEACHER: Do you ask that we turn back for your sake? Or do you agree that we throw you into the valley as the great custom demands?

BOY: No! I don't agree.

TEACHER (calling from Room 1 and Room 2): Come down here! He did not answer according to the custom.

3 STUDENTS: He said no. (Go down to Room 1) (to the boy) Why don't you answer as the custom demands. He who says A, must also say B. When you were asked before whether you would agree to everything that could happen to you on this trip, you answered yes.

BOY: The answer that I gave was false. But your question was even false. He who says A, does not have to say B. He can also realize that A was false. I wanted to get medicine for my mother. But now I've become sick myself so it's no longer possible. And I want to turn back immediately, now that things have changed, so I ask you to turn back and bring me home. Your research can certainly wait. If there's something to learn over there, as I hope there is, then it could only be that in these circumstances we should turn around. And as for the great ancient custom I see no sense to it. Rather I need a great new custom which we must introduce immediately: the custom to reflect on each new situation.

3 STUDENTS: (to the teacher) What are we to do? What the boy says is sensible, even if it's not heroic.

TEACHER: What you should do now I leave up to you, but I must tell you that people will hurl laughter and disgrace at you if you turn back.

3 STUDENTS: Isn't it a disgrace that he speaks for himself?

TEACHER: No, I see no disgrace in that.

3 STUDENTS: Then we'll turn back and no laughter and no abuse shall keep us from doing the sensible thing; and no old custom shall prevent us from agreeing to a valid thought.

Lean your head on our arms.

Don't strain yourself

We'll carry you carefully.

GREAT CHORUS:

So the friends took the friend

And established a new custom ,

And a new law

And they brought the boy back.

Side by side they walked pressed together

Against the abuse

Against the laughter, with open eyes,

No one more cowardly than his neighbor.



# BORIS PASTERNAK:

## The Death of Mayakovsky\*

Translated by Beatrice Scott

### I

In winter time the chain of boulevards, behind their double curtains of blackened trees, dissected Moscow. In the houses fires gleamed yellow, like the starry circles of lemons cut in half. The snow-laden sky hung low above the trees and everything white around was tinted blue.

Along the boulevards ran poorly-dressed young people, crouching as if to butt with their heads. I was acquainted with some of them, did not know the majority, but all of them together were my equals in age, that is, they were the numberless faces of my childhood.

People had just begun to call them by their patronymics, to endow them with rights and to initiate them into the secret of the words: to be in possession, to profit, to appropriate. They betrayed a hurry which deserves a more attentive investigation.

The world contains death and prevision. The unknown is dear to us, and what is known in advance is frightening, and every passion is a blind leap aside from the onrolling inevitable. Live species would have nowhere to exist and repeat themselves, if passion had nowhere to leap from that common road along which rolls that common time which is the time of the gradual disintegration of the universe.

But there is room for life to live and passion to leap, because there exists alongside the common time the unceasing endlessness of wayside regulations, undying in their reproduction, and because every new generation makes its appearance as one of these.

Bowed as they ran, young people hurried through the snowstorm, and although each had his own reasons for hurrying, still, they were spurred on by something they all had in common more than by their personal considerations, and this was their historical integrity, that is, the return of that passion with which humanity had just entered into them, rescued from the common road, for the countless time avoiding the end.

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\*This translation of the final third of *Safe Conduct*, Pasternak's autobiography, was made for *The Collected Prose Works* (Lindsay, Drummond Ltd., London, 1945). Pasternak was born in Moscow in 1890, the eldest son of Leonid Pasternak, the painter, and Rosa Kaufman-Pasternak, the musician. He was early interested in music, but broke off study after an unsatisfactory interview with Scriabine. He lived in Germany as a student until World War I, during which he worked in a factory in the Urals. His poetry and short stories and his translations of Shakespeare, Goethe, and Verlaine have established him as one of the foremost Soviet writers. His poems have been translated for several British periodicals and for *New Directions*, which will offer a volume of his prose in 1947.

And to shield them from the duality of a flight through the unavoidable and so that they would not go mad, would not abandon what was begun and would not hang themselves over the whole globe, behind the trees along all the boulevards a power stood on guard, a power terribly tried and experienced, a power which followed them with wise eyes. Art stood behind the trees, an art which discriminates so wonderfully in us that we are always at a loss to know from what non-historical worlds it has brought its skill to see history in silhouette. It stood behind the trees and bore a terrible resemblance to life, and it endured this likeness, as the portraits of wives and mothers are endured in the laboratories of the learned, those dedicated to the Natural Sciences, that is, to the gradual puzzling out of death.

What kind of art was this? It was the young art of Scriabin, Blok, Komissarzhevsky, Biely—the leading art, enthralling, original. And it was so astounding that not only did it not awake any thoughts of a change, but on the contrary, one wanted to repeat it and make it all the more lasting from its very beginning, only to repeat it more swiftly, more warmly and more completely. One desired to repeat it at a gulp, which would be inconceivable without passion, then passion leapt aside, and along this track something new was made. But the new did not arise from a change of the old, which is the generally accepted way of thinking, but quite the opposite, it arose from an exultant reproduction of the pattern. This was the nature of the art. And what was the nature of the generation?

Boys who were about my own age had been thirteen in 1905 and were nearly twenty-two before the war. Both their critical ages coincided with the two red dates of their country's history. Their childhood adolescence and their calling-up at coming of age were immediately fastened to an epoch of transition. The whole bulk of our time is threaded through with their nerves and is politely abandoned by them for the use of the aged and of children.

When I returned from abroad it was the Centenary of the Napoleonic Invasion of 1812. The railroad from Brestsk was renamed the Alexander. The stations were whitewashed, the watchmen at the bells were dressed in clean blouses. The station hall at Kubinka was stuffed with flags and at the doors a reinforced guard stood on duty. Nearby a grand parade was taking place and for this event the platform burnt with a bright heap of porous sand which had not yet been stamped down everywhere.

This did not call up in the passengers memories of the events commemorated. The jubilee decorations exhaled the primary peculiarity of the reign—an indifference to native history. And if the festivities were reflected in anything, it was not in the course of thoughts but in the course of the train because it was detained longer than was expected at stations and was stopped more than usual in the fields by signals.

I could not help remembering Serov, who had died the winter before this, his stories of the times when he was painting the Royal Family, caricatures made by artists at the drawing evenings which the Yusupovs gave, curiosities accompanying the Kutepovski edition of the "Tsar's Hunt," and a large number



of other minor incidents fitting to the occasion, linked with the school of painting which was attached to the Ministry of the Imperial Court, and in which we had lived for about twenty years. I could recall 1905 in the same way, the drama in the Kasatkin family and my tuppenny-ha'penny revolutionism which went no further than bravado in the face of a Cossack whip and its blow on the back of a padded coat. Finally, as regards the stations, the guards and the flags, obviously they too presaged a most serious drama, and were not the naive vaudeville which my thoughtless apoliticism saw in them.

The generation was apolitical, I might have said, if I did not admit that the insignificant part of it with which I came in contact was insufficient for even a judgment on the intelligentsia as a whole. That was the side it turned towards me, I will say, but it turned with the same side towards the times, stepping forward with its first declaration about its learning, its philosophy and its art.

## II

But culture does not fall into the arms of the first willing comer. Everything enumerated above had to be taken from conflict. The conception of love as a duel fits this case too. The transition of art could only be actualised for the boy in his teens in the result of the militant tendency, lived through with all its anxieties as a personal experience. The literature of the beginners was flecked with signs of these conditions. The apprentices separated in groups. The groups were divided into those of the Epigones\* and those of the Novators. These were parts, impossible in isolation, of an outburst which was being anticipated with such insistence that it was already glutting everything around it with the atmosphere of a novel which was not merely being awaited but was already in the throes of composition. The Epigones represented an impulse without fire or gifts. The Novators — nothing except a castrated hatred, an immovable militancy. These were the words and movements of big talk, overheard ape-like and carried away at haphazard in bits, in a disjointed literalness without any conception of the meaning which was animating this storm.

Meanwhile the fate of the conjectural poet-elect was already hanging in the air. One could not yet exactly say who he would be, but one could almost say what he would be like. And in outward appearance dozens of young people were alike troubled, thought alike, alike held pretensions to originality. As a movement, the Novators were distinguished by a visible unanimity. But as with movements of all times, this was the unanimity of lottery tickets, whirled in a swarm by the mixing-machine for the draw. The fate of the movement was to remain a movement for ever, that is, a curious event for the mechanical mixing of chances, from the hour when some of these tickets, issuing from the lottery wheel, would flare out in the conflagration of winning.

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\*The Greek word, originally used in reference to the sons of the Seven against Thebes, is here used in its wider meaning of "the less distinguished successors of an illustrious generation."

—Translator's Note.

of conquest, personality and a nominal meaning. This movement was called Futurism.

The winner of the draw and its justification was Mayakovsky.

### III

We made each other's acquaintance in the constrained circumstances of group prejudice. A long time before that, Y. Anisimov had shown me his poems in the "*Sadok Sudei*," as a poet shows off another poet. But this was in the Epigone circle "*Lyrika*." The Epigones were not ashamed of their sympathies, and in their circle Mayakovsky was discovered as a phenomenon soon to fulfill great promise, as a giant.

Besides this, I discovered in the Novator group "Centrifuge" in which I soon found myself (this was in the winter of 1914), that Shershenevich, Bol'shakov and Mayakovsky were our enemies and that a dispute which was far from a joke was in progress with them. The prospect of a quarrel with a man who had once already astounded me and who had been attracting me from a distance more and more, surprised me not a whit. The whole originality of Novatorism consisted in this. The birth of "Centrifuge" was attended by endless rows the whole winter. The whole winter I knew nothing except that I was playing at party discipline, did nothing but sacrifice to it taste and conscience. I prepared myself again to give up whatever they wanted and whenever it was needed. But this time I overestimated my powers.

It was a hot day towards the end of May, and we were already seated in a teashop on the Arbat, when the three named above entered from the street noisily and youthfully, gave their hats to the waiter and without dropping their voices, which had just been drowned by the noise of trams and cart-horses, made in our direction with an unconstrained dignity. They had beautiful voices. The subsequent tendency towards declamation in poetry sprang from them. They were dressed elegantly, we—untidily. Our antagonists' position was from every point of view superior to our own.

While Bobrov sparred with Shershenevich—and the crux of the matter was that they had once picked a quarrel with us and we had replied even more rudely, and it was necessary to bring all this to an end—I watched Mayakovsky uninterruptedly. I think that was the first time I had observed him from near.

His "e" for "a", a piece of sheet-iron rocking his diction, was an actor's trait. His calculated hardness was easily interpretable as a distinguishing mark of other professions and conditions. He was not alone in his impressiveness. His friends sat beside him. Of them, one, like him, was playing the dandy, the other, like him, was an authentic poet. But all these similarities did not diminish Mayakovsky's exceptional quality but stressed it. As distinct from playing each game separately he played them all at once, in contempt of acting a part he played at life. The latter—without any thought one might have of his future end—one caught at a glance. And it was this which chained one to him and terrified one.



Although one can see at their full height anyone who is walking or standing up, the same circumstance on the appearance of Mayakovsky seemed miraculous, forcing everyone to turn in his direction. In his case the natural appeared supernatural. The reason for this was not his height, but another more general and less obvious peculiarity. To a greater extent than other people he was all in his appearance. He had as much of the expressive and final about him as the majority have little, issuing rarely as they do, and only in cases of exceptional upheavals, from the mists of unfathomable intentions and bankrupt conjectures. It was as if he existed on the day following a terrific spiritual life lived through for use in all subsequent events, and everyone came upon him in the sheaf of its unbending sequences. He sat in a chair as on the saddle of a motorcycle, leant forward, cut and quickly swallowed his *Wiener Schnitzel*, played cards, turned his eyes all ways without turning his head, strolled majestically along the Kuznetsky, intoned hollowly in his nose like fragments of a liturgy particularly significant extracts from his own and other people's stuff, frowned, grew, rode and made public appearances, and in the depths behind all this, as behind the straightness of a skater at full speed, there glimmered always his one day preceding all other days, when this amazing initial take-off was made, straightening him so boldly and independently. Behind his manner of bearing himself, something like decision took one by surprise, decision when it is already put into action and its consequences can no longer be averted. His genius was such a decision, and a meeting with it had once so amazed him that it became his theme's prescription for all times, for the incarnation of which he gave the whole of himself without pity of vacillation.

But he was still young, the forms destined for this theme still lay ahead. But the theme was insatiable and intolerant of procrastination. And so at the beginning it was necessary for its benefit to savour the rapture of the future in advance, and rapture in advance, realised in the first person, is posing.

From these poses, natural in the world of highest self-expression, like the rules of decency in everyday existence, he chose the pose of external integrity, the hardest of all for an artist, and as regards his friends and relations—the most noble. He kept this pose up so completely that it is hardly possible to give the characteristics of its inmost secret.

And besides this the mainspring of his lack of shyness was a wild shyness, and beneath his pretended freedom hit a phenomenally apprehensive lack of freedom, inclined towards purposeless moroseness. The mechanism of his yellow coat was just as delusive. With its aid he was not fighting against the middle-class jackets at all, but against the black velvet of the talent in himself, whose luscious dark-brown forms began to trouble him earlier than happens with less gifted people. Because no one knew so well as he the whole triviality of the natural fire which cannot be stirred up gradually with cold water, and the fact that the passion which suffices for the continuation of the race is insufficient for artistic creation because that stands in need of a passion required for the continuation of the *image* of the race, that is, of a passion which inwardly resembles passions and whose novelty inwardly resembles a new promise.

Suddenly the parley ended. The antagonists whom we should have annihilated went away unvanquished. Rather the terms of the truce which was concluded were humiliating for us.

Meanwhile it had grown dark outside. It began to drizzle. In the absence of our foes the restaurant became depressingly empty. The flies became visible, the uneaten cakes, the glasses blinded with hot milk. But the thunderstorm did not take place. The sun beat sweetly on the pavement, twisted like fine mauve sweet peas. It was May, 1914. Historic changes were so near! But who thought of them? The clumsy town was aflame with enamel and gold foil as in the story of the "Golden Cockerel." The lacquered green of the poplars shone. Colours were for the last time that poisonous grassy-green, from which they were soon parted for ever. I was crazy about Mayakovsky and was already missing him. Need I add that I did not give up the people I had meant to?

#### IV

We met by chance on the following day under the awning of the Greek café. The slice of large yellow boulevard stretched between Pushkin and Nikitin Streets. Thin long-tongued dogs stretched, yawned and arranged their heads more comfortably on their front paws. Nannies, kindred souls, were talking scandal and lamenting about something or other. Butterflies suddenly folded their wings, melting in the heat, and as suddenly opened them, attracted sideways by the unequal waves of haze. A little girl in white, probably dripping, leapt in the air encircling herself from head to foot with the whistling rings of a skipping rope.

I saw Mayakovsky in the distance and pointed him out to Loks. He was playing at "heads or tails" with Khodasevich. At that moment Khodasevich got up, paid his losses and came out from the awning in the direction of Strastnoe. Mayakovsky was left alone at his table. We came in, greeted him and began talking. A little later he offered to read one or two things.

The poplars glimmered green. The limes dryly glinted grey. The sleepy dogs driven out of all patience by the fleas leapt on all four paws at once and calling heaven to witness their moral helplessness against a brutal force flung themselves on the sand in a state of exasperated sleepiness. Engines on the Brestsk road, now changed to the Alexander, uttered hoarse whistles. And all around people cut hair, shaved, baked and fried, sold their wares, moved about — and saw nothing.

It was the tragedy "Vladimir Mayakovsky" which had just come out then. I listened raptly, with all my heart, holding my breath, forgetting all about myself. I had never heard anything like this before.

It contained everything. The boulevards, the dogs, the limes and the butterflies. The hairdressers, bakers, tailors and engines. Why cite them? We all remember the heat-oppressed mysterious summer text, now accessible to anyone in the tenth edition.

In the distance locomotives roared like the white sturgeon. In the hoarse



cry of his creation lay the same absolute far distance as on earth. Here there was that profound animation, without which there is no originality, that infinity, which opens out from any one point in life in any direction, without which poetry is only a misunderstanding, something temporarily unexplained.

And how simple all this was! The creation was called a tragedy. And that is what it ought to be called. The tragedy was called "Vladimir Mayakovsky." The title contained the simple discovery of genius, that a poet is not an author, but — the subject of a lyric, facing the world in the first person. The title was not the name of the composer but the surname of the composition.

## V

On that occasion I really carried him entire with me from the boulevard into my own life. But he was gigantic — it was impossible to retain him when apart. And I lost him. At that time he reminded me of himself. "The Cloud in Trousers," "The Backbone Flute," "War and Peace," "Man." The pieces which saw the light in the intervals were so tremendous that extra-ordinary reminders were needed. And such they were. Each of the stages named found me unprepared. At each stage, developing beyond recognition, he was born entirely anew, as for the first time. It was impossible to get used to him. What was it then that was so unusual about him?

He was endowed with comparatively constant qualities. And my enthusiasm was relatively as enduring. It was always ready for him. It would seem that in such conditions my getting accustomed to him should not have been by leaps. But this is how the matter stood.

While he existed creatively I spent four years getting used to him and did not succeed. Then I got used to him in two and a quarter hours which was the time it took to read and examine the uncreative "150,000,000." Then I languished for more than ten years with this acclimatisation. Then suddenly lost it in tears all at once, when *at the top of his voice* he reminded one of himself, as he used to do, but now already from the grave.

It was not impossible to get used to him but to the world he controlled and either set in motion or stopped at his caprice. I shall never understand what benefit he derived from the demagnetising of the magnet, when, retaining its whole appearance, the horseshoe which before had reared up every idea and attracted every weight with its twin poles, could no longer move a single grain. There will hardly be found another example in history when a man who was so far advanced in a new proficiency should renounce it so fully, in the hour foretold by himself when that proficiency even at the price of inconveniences would have fulfilled such a vital need.

It was impossible to get accustomed to the tragedy of Vladimir Mayakovsky, to the *perpetuation of the surname*, to the poet who was perpetuating himself eternally in poetry, to the possibility realised by the strongest, and not to the so-called "interesting man."

Burdened with this inability to accustom myself to him, I returned home from the boulevard. I was renting a room which overlooked the Kremlin.

Nicholas Aseyev was liable to put in an appearance at any time from over the river. He would come from the Sisters S—, a deeply and variously gifted family. I would recognise in the man coming in: imagination bright in its lack of method, the ability to feign inconsistency in music, sensitiveness and the subtlety of an authentic artistic nature. I was fond of him. He was carried away by Khlebnikov. I cannot understand what he found in me. We were looking for different things in art as in life.

## VI

The poplars glimmered green and the reflections of gold and white stone ran like lizards over the river stream, when I passed through the Kremlin to Pokrovka, arrived at the station and went thence with the Baltrushaitises to the Oka in Tula. Vyacheslav Ivanov lived next door there. And the other holiday-makers were also from artistic circles.\*

The lilac was still in bloom. Running far out into the road, it was just arranging without music or bread-and-salt a lively welcome on the wide drive into the estate. For a long way down beyond it, the fore-court, bare, worn by cattle and overgrown with uneven grass, descended towards the houses.

The summer promised to be hot and rich. I was translating Kleist's "Broken Jug" for the Cine-Theatre then newly started. There were a great many snakes in the park. We discussed them every day. We discussed them over the fish-broth and during bathing. When I was invited to say something about myself, I would start talking about Mayakovsky. There was no mistake about it. I was deifying him. I personified him in my spiritual horizons. Vyacheslav Ivanov was the first, as I remember, to compare him to Hugo-esque hyperbolism.

## VII

When war was declared the weather broke, the rains came and the first tears of the women streamed down. The war was still new and terrifying in this newness. No one knew how to treat it and it was like entering icy water.

The passenger trains in which the local people of the district left for the mobilisation made their departure in accordance with the old time-table. The train would start and in its wake, beating its head on the rails, would roll a wave of cuckoo-crying unlike weeping, unnaturally soft and bitter like a rowanberry. An elderly woman wrapped up unsuitably for summer would be swept off her feet and embraced. The relations of the recruit would draw her away with monosyllabic persuasions beneath the station porch.

This lamentation which continued only for the first few months, was wider than the grief of the young wives and the mothers which was poured out into it. It was ushered on to the line in perfect order. The station-masters touched their caps as it passed them by, the telegraph poles made way for it. It transformed the district, was everywhere visible in the pewter-cast of misfortune,

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\*Among them E. V. Muratova.—*Author's Note.*



because it was an unaccustomed thing of burning brightness which had lain untouched since wars gone by. They had taken it from a secret place during the previous night and brought it behind the horses to the station in the morning, and after they had led it out by the hand from the station porch they would carry it back along the bitter mud of the village road. That was how they saw the men off who were going as single volunteers or driving to town in green carriages with their fellow-countrymen.

But soldiers in ready marching order passing straight into the horror itself were seen off without commotion. With everything strapped on they jumped unpleasant-like from the high railway trucks on to the sand, jingling their spurs and trailing behind them through the air their overcoats which were thrown on anyhow. Others stood in the wagons at the cross-beams patting the horses, which stamped the dirty woodwork of the rotting floor with the proud beats of their hooves. The platform did not give away free apples, did not search its pocket for an answer, but flushing crimson laughed into the corners of tightly pinned kerchieves.

September was drawing to a close. Like a fire muddled with water a dusty gold nut tree burnt in the river vale, bent and broken by the winds and the climbers after nuts, an absurd image of desolation, doubled up at every joint in stubborn opposition to misfortune.

One day in August in the early afternoon the knives and plates on the terrace were tinged with green, twilight fell on the flower garden, the birds were hushed. The sky began to tear off the pale network of night with which it was deceptively overcast, as with an "invisible cap." The park, deathly still, gazed up in cross-eyed malevolence at the humiliating puzzle which was making something supernumerary of the earth in whose loud praise it had so proudly drunk with all its roots. A hedgehog rolled on to the path. A dead adder lay on it in an Egyptian hieroglyphic which resembled a piece of string folded in a knot. The hedgehog moved it and suddenly dropped it and lay very still. And he broke and scattered his armful of needles again and stuck out and hid his snout. During the time the eclipse lasted, the ball of prickly suspicion contracted, now in a little boot, now in a lump, until the foreboding of a rising indecision drove it back to its hole.

## VIII

In the winter, Z. M. M.—, one of the S— sisters took a flat in the Tversky Boulevard. People often dropped in to see her. I. Dobroveyin (a friend of mine), who was a fine musician used to go. Mayakovsky came. By that time I had grown accustomed to regard him as the foremost poet of our generation. Time has shown that I was not wrong.

Certainly, Khlebnikov was there too, with his delicate authenticity. But to this day part of his merit is still inaccessible to me, because poetry as I understand it flows through history and in collaboration with real life.

And Severyanin also came. A lyric poet whose outpourings fell directly into verses with ready-made forms, resembling Lermontov's, and who, for all his

slipshod triteness, took one by surprise with just this rare structure of his open frank talent.

But the greatest poetic destiny was Mayakovsky's, and this was confirmed later. Whenever afterwards our generation expressed itself dramatically, lending its voice to a poet, be it to Esenin, Sel'vinsky or Tsvetaeva, in precisely those ties which bound them to each other and to their generation, that is, in their appeal from their times to the universe, the echo of Mayakovsky's consanguineous note was heard. I say nothing regarding masters such as Tikhonov and Aseyev because I am limiting myself now in what follows to this dramatic tendency, one with which I am more familiar, whilst they have chosen a different one for themselves.

Mayakovsky rarely came alone. His suite was usually composed of Futurists, men belonging to the movement. In M---'s domestic arrangements I saw a primus then for the first time in my life. As yet the invention did not produce a stink and who would have thought that it was destined to sully life and multiply so widely?

The gleaming framework roared and sent up the flame at high pressure. One by one chops were toasted over it. The arms of the mistress of the house and her assistants were covered with a chocolate-coloured Caucasian sunburn to the elbows. This tiny cold kitchen became a settlement in the fire country, when on leaving the dining-room we joined the ladies, and like Patagonians, innocent of technical knowledge, bent over the copper disk which seemed the incarnation of something luminous and Archimedian. And — we would run out for beer and vodka.

In the drawing-room a tall Christmas tree stretched its paws towards the piano and conspired mysteriously with the trees in the boulevard. It was as yet solemnly gloomy. Shining tinsel chains, some of which were in little cardboard boxes, loaded the sofa like sweetmeats. There were special invitations for decorating the Christmas tree, for the morning wherever possible, that is about three in the afternoon.

Mayakovsky read, made everyone laugh, dined hastily in his impatience to sit down to cards. He was scathingly polite and concealed his constant excitement with great artistry. Something was going on inside him, he was passing through a crisis. He posed openly but with such a hidden anxiety and fever that drops of cold sweat broke out on his pose.

## IX

But it was not always that he came with a retinue of Novators. Often a poet would accompany him, who could pass the test which is what Mayakovsky's presence usually came to be, with honours. Of the many people whom I saw at his side, Bol'shakov was the only one I could associate with him without a sense of strain. One could even listen to them in succession without injuring one's hearing. It was easy to understand this friendship which like his subsequent somewhat more powerful attachment to L. Y. Brik which lasted till he died, was entirely natural. One did not suffer for Mayakovsky when

he was in Bol'shakov's company, he was not divided against himself and did not demean himself.

Usually his sympathies aroused perplexity. A poet with an exhilaratingly great self-knowledge, who had gone further than any one else in stripping bare the lyrical element and in linking it to a giant theme with a medieval courage, until his poetry spoke with a voice which was almost that of sectarian identities, he seized on another more localised tradition with the same breath and strength.

He saw at his feet a city which gradually rose towards him from the depths of "The Bronze Horseman," "Crime and Punishment," "Petersburg," a city covered with a haze which with unnecessary prolixity was called the problem of the Russian intellectuals, but which was in reality nothing more than a city covered with the haze of eternal conjectures about the future, the precarious Russian city of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

He embraced views such as these, and along with such immense contemplations he remained faithful, almost as though it were a duty, to the pygmy projects of his fortuitous coterie, hastily gathered together and always indecently mediocre. A man for whom truth held an almost animal attraction, he surrounded himself with shallow dilettantes, men with fictitious reputations and false unwarranted pretensions. Or, what is more important: to the end he kept finding something in the veterans of a movement which he had himself abolished long ago and forever.

Probably these were the consequences of a fatal isolation, established and then voluntarily aggravated with that pedantry with which the will sometimes follows a road known to be inevitable.

## X

But all this became intelligible only later. The symptoms of future singularities were then still very slight. Mayakovsky recited Akhmatova, Severyanin, his own and Bol'shakov's poems on the war and the city, and when we left our friends at night, the city lay deep in the rear of the firing line.

We were already failing to answer the problem which is always a difficult one in immense Russia — the problem of transport and supplies. Already out of new words: equipment, medicines, licences, refrigerators, the first grubs of speculation were being hatched. And while speculation thought in terms of transport, essential trainloads of fresh population were being conveyed hastily, day and night, to the sound of songs, in exchange for the casualties which returned in the hospital trains. And the best of the young girls and women became nurses.

The place for honest attitudes was the front, and the rear would have fallen into a false position anyway, even if it were not in addition voluntarily supporting a lie. Although no one was yet trying to catch it, the city hid behind phrases like a thief who has been apprehended. Like all hypocrites Moscow led an outwardly heightened existence and was brilliant with the artificial brilliance of a florist's window in winter.



At night the voice of Moscow seemed to resemble Mayakovsky's exactly. The events which took place there and the accumulating thunder of his voice were alike as two drops of water. But this was not that resemblance about which Naturalism dreams, but the connection which binds the anode to the cathode, the artist to life, the poet to his time.

The house of the head of the Moscow police stood opposite M---'s. During the autumn, for several days, one of the formalities which are necessary to the signing-on of volunteers brought us together there — myself, Mayakovsky and, I think, Bol'shakov. We concealed the procedure from one another. I did not bring it to a conclusion in spite of parental encouragement. But, unless I am mistaken, neither did my comrades.

Shestov's son, a handsome ensign, made me swear to put this idea from me. With a sober positiveness he described the front to me, warning me that I would find there the precise contrary on what I expected. Shortly afterwards he fell in the first engagement which took place after his return from this leave.

Bol'shakov entered the cavalry school at Tver, Mayakovsky was called up later in his turn, and I, after having been discharged in the summer just before the outbreak of the war, was released by all subsequent medical examinations.

A year later I left for the Urals. Before leaving I spent several days in Petersburg, where one was less obviously conscious of the war than in Moscow. Mayakovsky, who had been called up by then, had been living there for some time.

As always, the animation of the capital was concealed by its fantastic spaces which can so easily contain all the necessary movements of life within their great sweeps. The streets themselves, colour of winter and twilight, did not need the addition of many lamps or much snow to their silvery violence to make them speed into the distance and sparkle.

Mayakovsky and I walked down the Liteynoy: he trampled miles of roadway under his great strides, and as always I was astounded by the gift he had for seeming the perfect frame for any landscape. In this he set off Petersburg even better than Moscow.

This was the time of "The Backbone Flute" and the first drafts of "War and Peace." "The Cloud in Trousers" had just come out in an orange cover. He was telling me about the new friends to whom he was taking me, about his acquaintance with Gor'ki, about how the social theme was taking an increasing part in his projects and allowing him to work in a new way, spending fixed times over allotted tasks. And it was then that I went to see the Briks for the first time.

My thoughts about him fell into place more naturally in the wintry and half-Asiatic landscape of "The Captain's Daughter," in the Urals, and on the banks of Pugachev's Kama, than in the capital.

I returned to Moscow soon after the February revolution. Mayakovsky came down from Petrograd and stayed in the Stoleshnikov mews. In the morning I went to see him in his rooms. He was just getting up and as he dressed he read me the new parts of his "War and Peace." I made no attempt

to enlarge on my impressions. He read them in my eyes. And besides he knew the extent of his influence on me. I started talking about Futurism and said it would be wonderful if he would send it all to the devil now, publicly. Laughing, he almost agreed with me.

## XI

I have already shown the effect Mayakovsky produced on me. But there is no love without scars and sacrifices. I have described Mayakovsky as he was when he entered my life. There remains to be told what happened to my life because of this. I shall now repair this omission.

I came home from the boulevard that day, utterly shaken, not knowing what to do. I admitted my own complete lack of talent. And this was only half the trouble. For I felt that in some way I was guilty before him and I could not decide how. If I had been younger I would have abandoned literature. But my age was an obstacle. After all my metamorphoses I could not decide to alter course for the fourth time.

Something else happened. The times, and everything which influenced us both, bound me to Mayakovsky. We possessed certain things in common. I took note of them. I understood that unless one did something with oneself, these would become more numerous later: that he must be preserved from their triteness. Unable to define this I decided to renounce whatever it was which led me up to it. I abandoned the Romantic manner. And that is how the non-Romantic style of "Over the Barriers" came about.

But a whole conception of life lay concealed under the Romantic manner which I was to deny myself from henceforth. This was the conception of life as the life of the poet. It had come down to us from the Symbolists and had been adapted by them from the Romantics, principally the Germans.

This conception had influenced Blok but only during a short period. It was incapable of satisfying him in the form in which it came naturally to him. He could either heighten it or abandon it altogether. He abandoned the conception. Mayakovsky and Esenin heightened it.

In the poet who imagines himself the measure of life and pays for this with his life, the Romantic conception manifests itself brilliantly and irrefutably in his symbolism, that is in everything which touches upon Orphism and Christianity imaginatively. In this sense something inscrutable was incarnate both in the life of Mayakovsky and in the fate of Esenin, which defies all epithets, demanding self-destruction and passing into myth.

But outside the legend, the Romantic scheme is false. The poet who is its foundation, is inconceivable without the non-poets who must bring him into relief, because this poet is not a living personality absorbed in the study of moral knowledge, but a visual-biographical "emblem," demanding a background to make his contours visible. In contra-distinction to the Passion Plays which needed a Heaven if they were to be heard, this drama needs the evil of mediocrity in order to be seen, just as Romanticism always needs philistinism and with the disappearance of the petty bourgeoisie loses half its poetical content.

A scenic conception of biography was inherent in my time. I shared this conception with everyone else. I abandoned it before it had yet hardened into a duty with the Symbolists, before it bore any implication of heroism and before it smelt of blood. And in the first place, I freed myself from it unconsciously, abandoning the Romantic method for which it served as basis. In the second place, I shunned it consciously also, considering its brilliance unsuited to my craft and feared any kind of poetising which would place me in a false and incongruous position.

When "My Sister, Life" appeared, and was found to contain expressions not in the least contemporary as regards poetry, which were revealed to me during the summer of the revolution, I became entirely indifferent as to the identity of the power which had brought the book into being because it was immeasurably greater than myself and than the poetical conceptions surrounding me.

## XII

From the Sivtsev-Vrazhek the winter twilight, the roofs and trees of the Arbat gazed into a dining-room which was not turned out for whole months at a time. The owner of the flat, a bearded journalist of extra-ordinary absent-mindedness and good nature, produced the impression of being a bachelor, although he possessed a family in the Orenburg province. When he had a leisure moment he would gather off the table whole armfuls of newspapers reflecting every shade of opinion for the whole month, along with the petrified remains of his breakfasts, hunks of bacon fat and crusts of bread which had been put by regularly and had piled up amid relics of his morning reading.

Before I had time to be seized with any pangs of conscience, on the thirtieth of the month the flames in the stove became translucent, roaring and odorous, as in the Christmas tales of Dickens about roast geese and counting-house clerks. At nightfall the sentries opened fire enthusiastically from their revolvers.

Sometimes the sound of their gunfire gave place to a savage cry. And in those days very often it was impossible to make out whether the sound came from the street or from the house. This during lucid intervals in an atmosphere of complete insanity, would be the call of the unique inhabitant of the study, a plug-in telephone.

From there the telephone bell invited me to a reunion in Trubnikovskoy of all the poetic strength which could then be mustered in Moscow. I used to have arguments with Mayakovsky on that same telephone, but a long time before this, before the revolt of Kornilov.

Mayakovsky informed me that he had added my name to a public notice which included the names of Bol'shakov and Lipskerov but also, alas, those most faithful of the faithful who behaved like bulls in a china shop. I was almost glad to have this opportunity of speaking with my favorite for the first time as with a stranger, and becoming more and more exasperated I parried his arguments one by one with my own justifications. I was not so much surprised at his lack of ceremony, as at the poorness of imagination this revealed.



because the incident, as I pointed out, did not consist in his having made use of my name without permission, but in his sorry conviction that my two-year absence had not changed my destiny or my occupation. He should at least have evinced a little interest as to whether I were still alive and had not dropped literature for something better. He replied reasonably enough to all this that we had already met that spring after my return from the Urals. But for some extraordinary reason this argument failed to impress me. And I demanded with quite uncalled-for persistence that he should correct the announcement in the newspapers—a demand which it was impossible to fulfil as the evening was so close, and one which in view of my lack of fame at the time, amounted to affected nonsense.

Although I had told no one about “My Sister, Life” and had concealed what I was going through, I could not bear everyone round me to feel that I was going on just as before. And besides precisely that conversation in the spring, to which Mayakovsky had alluded so unsuccessfully, was perhaps lying dumbly at the back of my mind, and I was irritated by the inconsistency of this invitation after everything we had said then.

### XIII

He reminded me of this telephone encounter some months later at the house of the amateur versifier A——. Balmont, Khodasevich, Baltrushaitis, Ehrenburg, Vera Inber, Antokol'sky, Kamensky, Burlyuk, Mayakovsky, Andrei Biely and Tsvetaeva were all there. Obviously I was not to know what an incomparable poet she was to become later. But although I did not even know the fine “*Versti*” she was writing at the time, I set her apart instinctively because of her simplicity which immediately caught one's attention. One divined in her that readiness which is dear to me, the readiness to part with any habits and privileges when something great kindles one's passion and arouses admiration. On that occasion we exchanged a few candid, friendly words. At that evening gathering she was for me a palladium against the representatives of the two movements, Futurist and Symbolist, who thronged the room.

The reading began. They read by seniority without any perceptible success. When it came to Mayakovsky's turn, he got up and clasping the edge of an empty shelf which overhung the back of the divan, he began to read “Man.” Like a bas-relief, with time his background, as I always imagined him, he towered above those who were seated and those who were standing, and, now supporting his fine head with his hand, now resting his knee on the bolster of the divan, he read this poem with its unusual depth and its exalted inspiration.

Andrei Biely was sitting opposite him with Margarita Sabashnikov. He had lived in Switzerland during the war. The revolution brought him back to his own country. And probably, he was seeing and hearing Mayakovsky for the first time. He listened as one entranced and although he made no show of enthusiasm, his face spoke the more eloquently for that. He gazed at the man reading in amazement and gratitude. I could not see all the people listening.

Tsvetaeva and Ehrenburg among them. I observed those I could see. The majority never abandoned the jealous self-respect which framed them. They all felt that they were names, that they were all — poets. Only Biely listened, entirely lost within himself, carried away by a joy which regrets nothing, because on the heights where it feels itself at home, only sacrifices exist and the eternal eagerness for these.

Chance brought together before my eyes the two geniuses who justified the two literary tendencies which exhausted themselves one after another. Close to Biely, whose proximity I experienced with a proud joy, I felt the presence of Mayakovsky with a redoubled strength. He was revealed to me with all the freshness of a first encounter. That evening I experienced this for the last time.

Many years went by after this. One year later he was the first to whom I read "My Sister, Life," and I heard ten times more from him than I ever expected to hear from anyone. Another year passed. He read "150,000,000" to his own intimate circle. And for the first time I had nothing to say to him. Many years went by. We met in Russia and abroad, we tried to continue our intimacy, we tried to work together and I found myself understanding him less and less. Others will tell of this period, for during these years I came up against the limits of my understanding, and these, so it seems, were not to be enlarged. Reminiscences of this period would be colourless and would add nothing further to what I have said. Therefore I shall go straight on to what there remains for me to tell.

#### XIV

I shall tell of that eternally recurring strangeness which may be called the poet's last year.

Suddenly the projects which have not been realised come to an end. Often nothing is added to their lack of realisation except the new and only now admissible certainty that they have been realised. And this certainty is handed down to posterity.

Men change their habits, busy themselves with new plans, never cease to boast of their spiritual uplift. And suddenly — the end, sometimes violent, often natural, but even then, because there is no desire to defend oneself, very like suicide. And people pull up short and compare notes. They had been busy with new plans, they had been editing "*Sovremennik*." They had intended to publish a peasant journal. They had opened an exhibition of twenty years work, had been trying to get hold of a passport to travel abroad.

But to others, it appears, they had seemed depressed, querulous, tearful. Men who had spent whole decades of their lives in voluntary solitude, were suddenly as afraid of it as children of a dark room, and seizing the hands of chance visitors, clutched at their presence just to avoid being left alone. Those who witnessed these states of mind refused to credit their ears. Men who had received more assurance from life than it grants to most people, talked as if they had never even begun to live and possessed no past experience or support.

But who will understand and believe that it was suddenly given to the Pushkin\* of the year 1836 to recognise himself in the Pushkin of any year — in the Pushkin of the year 1936? That there comes a time when echoes, long flowing from others in response to the beats of that primary heart which is still alive, which pulsates, and thinks and wills to live, are suddenly united with a heart that has expanded and is resurrected. That these irregular heartbeats race on and on until finally they are so multiplied that suddenly they become even, and coinciding with the beat of the primary heart they begin to live one life with it in perfect harmony. That this is no metaphor. That this happens in life. That this is a stage in life, vehement, real, reinforced by ties of blood, though as yet without a name. That it is a kind of inhuman youth which breaks asunder the continuity of the life which has gone before with such abruptness and such joy, that, since it has no name and since comparison is inevitable, its abruptness above all suggests death. That it resembles death. That it resembles death, but is not death, not death at all, and if only, if only people did not insist on an exact resemblance.

And as this heart becomes transfigured, so memories and creations, creations and hopes, the world which has been created and the world which is still about to be created, change places. "What kind of private life did he lead?" they ask sometimes. You will now be enlightened. The vast sphere of maximum contradictions contracts, concentrates, becomes harmonious and suddenly, with a simultaneous shudder along all the parts of its structure, begins its physical existence. It opens its eyes, it sighs deeply, and throws off the last vestiges of a pose which was given him as a temporary aid.

And if one recalls that all this sleeps by night and watches by day, walks on two legs and is called man, it is natural to expect his behaviour to be related to this in appearance.

A large, real, and realistically existing city. It is winter there. The dark falls early there, and the working day takes place by the evening light.

Once, long, long ago it was terrifying. It had to be conquered, its indifference had to be broken. Much water has flowed since then. Recognition has been torn from it, its submission has become a habit. A great effort of mind is required to imagine how it could once inspire such nervousness. Its lights twinkle, and coughing into a handkerchief, they calculate on their adding machines. Snow covers it.

Its alarming immensity would race by unnoticed, if it was not for this new and savage impressionability. What is the shyness of adolescence in comparison with the vulnerability of this new birth? And once more, as in childhood, everything is observed. Lamps, typists, doors and galoshes, clouds, moon, snow. Terrible world!

It sticks out in the backs of fur coats and sledges; like a silver coin it rolls on its rim over the ground along the rails, far into the distance, where it gently tumbles flat in the mist and is picked up by a signalman's wife in a sheepskin

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\*Pushkin had begun to edit the review "*Souremennik*" (The Contemporary) in the year before his death.—*Translator's Note.*



jacket. It spins, grows small, seethes with contingencies. It is so easy to stumble on a slight want of attention in it! These are unpleasantnesses deliberately imagined. They are fanned up consciously out of nothing. But even when they have been blown upon they remain completely insignificant beside the wrongs which were so triumphantly trampled upon a short while ago. And that's the whole point, this latter defies comparison because it happened in that previous existence, which it was such a joy to tear asunder. Oh, if only this joy were more equable and more plausible!

But it is incredible and incomparable, and yet this joy hurls one from extreme to extreme as nothing else in life can ever hurl one anywhere.

And how discouraged people get at this! How Andersen with his hapless duckling repeats himself! What mountains are made out of molehills!

But perhaps the inner voice lies? Perhaps the terrible world is right?

"No smoking," "State your business briefly!" Are these not truths?

"He? Hang himself? Don't you worry."

"In love?—He?—Ha—ha—ha! He loves himself alone."

A large, real and realistically existing city. Winter and frost. In twenty degrees of frost, as if on stakes that have been driven into the ground, the creaking willow-plaited atmosphere hangs athwart the road. Everything there grows misty, rolls away and is hidden. But can there be such sadness when there is such joy? Is this not the second birth then? Is this death?

## XV

In the registry offices for the births, deaths and marriages of citizens, there are no instruments for measuring truth; sincerity is not measured by X-rays. Nothing besides firmness in the stranger's hand as he makes the entry, is necessary to make the registration valid. And after that no doubts are raised and the matter is not discussed further.

He will write his last letter in his own hand, bequeathing his treasure to the world as something obvious; he will measure his own sincerity and illumine it with an unalterable end; and now they will begin to discuss it, to doubt, to make comparisons.

They compare her with his previous loves, but she resembles him alone and all that precedes him. They make conjectures about his sentiment and do not know that one can love, not only for a day, even if it is for ever, but also even if it is not for ever, for the perfect accumulation of past days.

But two expressions have long reached a common triviality: a genius and a beautiful woman. And how much they have in common.

Her movements have been constrained since childhood. She is beautiful and she found this out early in life. And the so-called world of nature is the one place where she can be herself to the full, because when with others it is impossible to take a step without hurting others or herself being hurt.

A young girl, she leaves the house. What does she think of doing? She has already been receiving letters at the *poste-restante*. She has let two or three friends into her secret. Let us admit all this: she is going to a *rendezvous*.

She leaves the house. She would like the night to notice her, the heart of the air to be wrung at the sight of her, the stars to find something to say to her. She would like to be as remarkable as trees and fences and everything on earth are remarkable when they exist in the open air and not in the mind alone. But she would laugh in reply if anyone ascribed such desires to her. She is not thinking of anything like this. For thinking thoughts like these she has a distant brother in the world, who is fully accustomed to know her better than she knows herself and to be ultimately responsible for her. She loves the lustihood of nature sanely and does not admit that the balance of accounts between her feelings and the feelings of the universe never leaves her for a moment.

Spring, a spring evening, old women on the benches, low garden walls, weeping willows. Wine-green, weakly distilled impotent pale sky, dust and the fatherland, dry, brittle voices. Sounds dry as sticks and in among their splinters a smooth hot silence.

To meet her comes a man along the road, the very man whom it is natural for her to meet. In their joy, she keeps repeating that she has come for him alone. Partly she is right. Who is not in some measure the dust, the fatherland and the quiet spring evening? She forgets why she has come out but her feet remember. He and she walk on. They walk on together and the farther they go the more people come towards them. And as she loves the man she has met with all her soul, she is distressed at her feet not a little. But they bear her onwards and the two lovers can hardly keep up with one another, when suddenly the road widens somewhat and the place seems more solitary so that they hope to rest a little and to look about them; but often at this same time her distant brother makes his way into this place and they meet, and, so that no matter what, no matter what complete "I-am--you" should happen, he binds them with every tie conceivable in this world, and proudly, youthfully and wearily stamps profile against profile on a medal.

## XVI

The beginning of April surprised Moscow in the white stupor of returning winter. On the seventh it began to thaw for the second time, and on the fourteenth when Mayakovsky shot himself, not everyone had yet become accustomed to the novelty of spring.

As soon as I heard of the disaster I summoned O. S. there. Something urged me that the shock would give her own grief an outlet.

Between eleven and twelve the waves were still flowing in circles round the shot. The news made the telephones tremble, covered faces with pallor, and urged one towards the Lubyanskoy passage, across the courtyard into the house, where the staircase was already choked with people from the town and with the tenants of the house, who wept and pressed close to one another, hurled and splashed against the walls by the destructive force of the event. Y. Chernak and Romadin, who were first to inform me of the tragedy, came up to me.

Zhenia was with them.\* As soon as I caught sight of her my cheeks twitched convulsively. Weeping, she told me to run upstairs, but at that moment the body, completely covered with something, was brought down on a stretcher. Everyone hurried downstairs and blocked the doorway, so that by the time we had pushed our way out, the ambulance was already moving through the gates. We followed it into the Hendrikov mews.

Outside these gates life flowed on as usual — indifferent life, as it is wrongly called. The participation of the asphalt courtyard, eternal participant in such dramas, was left in our wake.

The spring air wandered weak-legged over the rubbery mud and seemed to be learning to walk. Cocks and children loudly proclaimed their presence abroad. In the early spring their voices are strangely far-reaching, in spite of the busy roar of the town.

The tram clambered slowly up the Svivaya slope. There is a place there where first the pavement on the right and then the pavement on the left approach so close to the windows of the tram, that when you hold on to the strap you make an involuntary bending movement over Moscow, as over an old woman who has slipped, for she suddenly falls on all fours and divests herself dully of her watch-makers and shoe-makers, lifts and rearranges roofs of some sort and belfries, then all of a sudden stands up, shaking the hem of her skirt, and drives the tram down a level and uninteresting street.

This time the movements of the town were so clearly an extract from the dead man's life — that is, they reminded one so powerfully of something significant in his being — that I shivered all over, and the famous telephone call from "The Cloud" thundered through me of its own accord, as if it were being uttered loudly by someone at my side. I was standing on the platform next to S — and bending towards her to remind her of the eight lines . . . "I feel that my 'I' is too small for me" . . . made my lips cling together like fingers in mittens, and I was so moved that I could not say a word.

Two empty motor cars were standing at the end of the Hendrikov mews. They were surrounded by an inquisitive crowd.

In the hall and in the dining-room men with and without hats were either sitting or standing. He was lying farther off, in his own study. The door from the hall into Lilya's room was open, and on the threshold, with his hand pressed against the lintel, Aseyev was crying. In the depths of the room by the window, his head sunk between his shoulders, Kirsanov was shaking with silent sobs.

The sodden mist of mourning was interspersed even here with anxious conversation carried on in a low voice, as at the end of a requiem, when after a service as sticky as jam, the first whispered words are so dry that they seem to come from under the floorboards and to smell of mice. In one of these intervals the porter carefully entered the room, a chisel inserted into his top-boot, and he removed the winter frame and opened the windows slowly and noise-

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\*The wife of Pasternak.—*Translator's Note.*



lessly. It was still cold outside without a coat, and sparrows and children were encouraging one another with their aimless chirping.

Leaving the dead man on tiptoe someone asked softly whether a telegram had been sent off to Lilya. L. A. G. replied that it had been sent. Zhenia took me aside and drew my attention to the courage with which L. A. was bearing the terrible burden of the catastrophe. She began to cry. I squeezed her hand firmly.

The apparent indifference of the boundless world poured in through the window. Along its whole length, grey trees stood guarding a frontier which seemed to divide earth and sea. I gazed at the branches with their warm, eager buds and tried to imagine that scarcely conceivable London, far, far beyond the trees, where the telegram had gone. Soon, over there, someone would cry out, stretch her hands towards us, fall down unconscious. My throat was constricted. I decided to enter his room once more and weep my fill.

He lay on his side, his face turned towards the wall, sombre, tall, a sheet covering him to his chin, his mouth half open as in sleep. Turning proudly away from us all, even when he was lying down, even in this sleep, he was going away from us in a stubborn endeavor to reach something. His face recalled the time, when he had spoken of himself as "beautiful in his twenty-two years,"\* for death had ossified a mask which rarely falls into its clutches.

Suddenly there was a movement in the hall. Alone, apart from her mother and sister, who were already giving away to their grief inaudibly in the crowd, the younger sister of the dead man, Ol'ga Vladimirovna, entered the flat. She entered possessively and noisily. Her voice floated into the room before her. Mounting the stairs alone she was speaking to someone in a loud voice, addressing her brother openly. Then she herself came into view, and walking through the crowd as through a rubbish pit, she reached her brother's door, threw up her hands and stood still. "Volodya!" she screamed in a voice which echoed through the whole house. A second flashed by. "He says nothing! He doesn't answer. Volodya. Volodya! How terrible!"

She was falling. They caught her up and quickly began to restore her to consciousness. She had hardly come to herself when she moved greedily towards the body, and sitting down at his feet, precipitately resumed her unexhausted dialogue. At last, as I had long desired, I burst into tears.

It had been impossible to cry like this in the place where he had killed himself, for there the gregarious spirit of drama had swiftly crowded out the explosive vividness of fact. Over there the asphalt courtyard stank of the deification of the inevitable as of saltpeter—that is, it stank of the false fatalism of towns, which had arisen from a simian mimicry and conceives life as a chain of sensations capable of faithful reproduction. There had been weeping over there too, but only because the constricted throat could reproduce with its animal second-sight the convulsions of inhabited houses, fire-escapes, a revolver case, of all those things which make one sick with despair and

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\*A reference to a phrase in the first part of Mayakovsky's "Cloud in Trousers," written at the age of twenty-two.—*Translator's Note.*

vomit with murder.

His sister was the first to mourn for him in her own way and as she wished to do, to mourn as people mourn for something great, and to the accompaniment of her words one could cry boundlessly and insatiably, as to the giant lament of an organ.

She would not be checked. "The bath-house for them!"<sup>1</sup> — Mayakovsky's own voice cried out indignantly, strangely transmuted by his sister's contralto. "To make it more amusing. They laughed. They called for him — And this is what was happening to him. Why didn't you come to us, Volodya?" she moaned through her sobs, but controlling herself, she moved closer to him impulsively. "Do you remember, do you remember, Volodichka?" she suddenly reminded him almost as though he were still alive, and began to recite:

"I feel that my 'I' is too small for me.  
Someone is obstinately breaking out of me.  
Hullo!  
Who's there? Mother?  
Mother! Your son is marvellously ill.  
Mother! His heart is on fire.  
Tell his sisters Lyudya and Olya,  
He has nowhere to go."<sup>2</sup>

## XVII

When I returned in the evening, he was already in his coffin. The faces which had filled the room during the day had given place to others. It was comparatively quiet. There was scarcely any more weeping.

Suddenly, outside, underneath the window I imagined I saw his life, which now already belonged entirely to the past. I saw it move away obliquely from the window like a quiet tree-bordered street resembling the Povarskaya. And the first to take its stand in this street, by the very wall, was our State, our unprecedented and unbelievable State, rushing headlong towards the ages and accepted by them for ever. It stood there below, one could hail it and take it by the hand. Its palpable strangeness somehow recalled the dead man. The resemblance was so striking that they might have been twins.

And it occurred to me then in the same irrelevant way that this man was perhaps this State's unique citizen. The novelty of the age flowed climatically through his blood. His strangeness was the strangeness of our times of which half is as yet to be fulfilled. I began to recall traits in his character, his independence, which in many ways, was completely original. All these were explained by his familiarity with states of mind which though inherent in our time, have not yet reached full maturity. He was spoilt from childhood by the future, which he mastered rather early and, apparently, without great difficulty.

<sup>1</sup> An allusion to Mayakovsky's satirical play "The Bath-house."—*Translator's Note.*

<sup>2</sup> This is a literal rendering, doing no justice to the poetry.—*Translator's Note.*

# LOUIS ARAGON:

## Night at High Noon

Translated by William Jay Smith

On the city there reigns a falsifying night  
 Noting white where his black was Harlequin  
 Finds nothing remarkable save the sight  
 Of actresses who are pinning with safety pins  
 On their bare shoulders the shadow of X-rays  
 Phantom-equation with beauties unknown O  
 The carnival at Nice is open these days  
 But no one but me has remembered to go

An inverted light inks out the masquerade  
 Beneath the dark mimosas a milky green  
 Gives the painted gardens the lustre of salad  
 Where they seem attached to the sickly stars  
 There a shawl of moonlight drapes the cottage stairs  
 In their basket of flowers a fixed ballet  
 Petrified football which descends upon the bay  
 The home folks are putting on the palace airs

Florentine sky-scrapers Miniature Kremlins  
 Delhi labyrinth Hundreds of poker dice  
 Delirious Alhambras Villas Halls  
 A caricatured Schoenbrunn A small-scale Venice  
 Victorian nightmare Orchid castles where  
 Pelléas his pale A B C's recites  
 And dreaming of stucco with tumbling hair  
 Mélisande in her nightgown looks out at the night

Cerulean balconies adorned with figurines  
 Homesick porcelains Tanagras and charms  
 The midnight swan swims after Lohengrin  
 And Sir Launcelot grieving for Manon's arms  
 Turns around to ogle at a fake Marie  
 Bashkirtseff conversing with the Walkyries  
 Bedlam in bed with Fornarina wary  
 Desdemona caught her Moor by surprise

The discobolus with his slow-motion stance  
 Between the world and us a pale moon spins



O many the dancers O quick is the dance  
 The intrigue thickens and the game begins  
 Where the white dominoes are like Arabian cloaks  
 From the nymphomaniacs Don Juan Tenorio flees  
 Lifts the mask from one of them almost chokes  
 It is not to pray that he's down on his knees

Love let us assign to dark mental wards  
 Their imaginary carnival I have enough  
 With the world as it is on picture post-cards  
 The gesticulation of these huge shadows  
 Will speak for the sun of their swollen hearts  
 The passers-by distrust each other's false noses  
 O night at high noon eclipsed in all parts  
 Sad as are kings in their photographed poses

## PABLO NERUDA:

### Atacama

Translated by Angel Flores

Insufferable voice! Disseminated  
 salt, substituted  
 ashes, black bough  
 at which bejeweled tip appears the blind  
 moon, through mourning corridors of copper.  
 What substance, what hollow swan  
 sinks its agonic nudeness in the sand  
 and petrifies its slow and liquid light?  
 What solid ray shatters its emerald  
 among its indomitable stones to the point  
 of coagulating the lost salt?  
 Land, land  
 over the sea, over the air, over the galloping  
 amazon laden with corals,  
 heaped storehouse where wheat  
 sleeps in the tremulous root of the bell:  
 O! mother of ocean, producer  
 of blind jasper and golden silica:  
 over your pure skin of bread, far from the forest  
 only your lines of secret,

only your forehead of sand,  
 only the nights and days of man,  
 but next to the thirst of the thistle, there  
 where a sunken and forgotten paper, a stone  
 marks the deep cradles of sword and goblet,  
 indicates the sleeping feet of calcium.

## Uncultivated Zones

Abandoned terminus. Crazy line  
 in which bonfire and furious thistle  
 form layers of electrified blue.

Stones beaten by  
 copper needles, roads  
 of materials silence, branches sunk  
 in the salt of the stones.

Here I am, here I am,  
 a human mouth delivered to the pale step  
 of a time imprisoned like goblet or hip,  
 central penitentiary of water without outlet,  
 tree of corporal fallen flower,  
 uniquely muted and brusque vein.

Country of mine, terrestrial and blind as  
 gnats born from the sand, for you all  
 the fountains of my soul, for you the perpetual  
 eyelids of my blood, for you on my return  
 my plate of poppies.

Your dry rock sounds,  
 the amputated old age of the hills, the silent  
 immensity of your thorns.

Give me at night, in the midst of the  
     terrestrial plants  
 the shy rose of dew which agitates your flag,  
 give me your moon or earthen bread sprinkled  
 with your dreadful dark blood:

    beneath your light of sand  
 there are no dead but long cycles of salt, blue  
 branches of mysterious living metal.

## I Want to Return to the South

Ill in Veracruz, I recall a day  
 in the South, my native land, a day silvery  
 as a rapid fish in the water of the sky,  
 Loncoche, Lonquimay, Carahue, seat  
 from up above, surrounded by silence and roots,  
 seated on their thrones of leathers and woods.  
 The South is a sunken horse  
 crowned with slow trees and dew,  
 when it lifts its green muzzle the drops fall,  
 the shadow of its tail wettens the great archipelado  
 and in its intestine grows venerated coal.  
 Never more, tell me, shadow; never more, tell me, hand;  
 never more, tell me, foot, door, leg, combat,  
 will you disturb the forest, the road, the ear of grain,  
 the mist, the cold, that which, blue, directed  
 each one of your ceaselessly consumed steps.  
 Sky, let me go one day from star to star  
 treading on light and gunpowder, shattering my blood  
 till I reach the heat of the rain!

I want to go  
 behind the woods along the fragrant River  
 Toltén, I want to come out of the sawmills  
 to enter the taverns with soaking feet,  
 to guide myself by the light of the electric hazelnut tree,  
 to stretch out beside the cows' dung,  
 to die and to live again biting wheat.

Ocean, bring me  
 a day of the South, a day clasped to your waves,  
 a day of wet tree, bring a blue  
 polar wind to my cold flag!



# REGINALD MOORE:

## Sold

Wednesday — market-day — the one day in the week when women are openly mouth to ear in the streets; when the windy little square below the castle ruins, hedged in by the public library and the old prison, is crowded with stalls; when all-day opening is the rule, for shops and for pubs. Women in harness along the curbs, riding the week's scandal; and in the pubs men sousing their doubts, busy with the nudge, the guffaw, the quick judgment.

Now in the Boar's Head, close by the Cross, "Oh," says Forster, the young gentleman farmer, "so he'll sell anything, will he?"

"The shirt off'n his back."

"Old iron or timber."

"Butter too, on the quiet. He says if it's needed and in supply why shouldn't a feller—"

"Oh," says Forster, "anything, eh?"

"Anything," they say, his cronies of a moment, of one bar, of one game of Burma Road, of three rounds of drinks: one in a cap, stocky, his eyes always glaring with affirmation, and the other with great bagging leggings, a cart-horse of a man. The first is Tom, the second Mitchell of Ponds Wood.

"The shirt off'n his back," says Tom, nodding so that his jaw rattles; he keeps wiping his lips as if to keep them clean enough for truth. "Any darned thing," he says then.

Mitchell of Ponds Wood taps Forster on the chest. "One week it's a nag—next it's the tin roof off his barn — then an old dog —"

"One thing he won't sell," says Forster, "— what'll you bet me?" Dark eyes challenging.

"Kidding?" says Mitchell of Ponds Wood, "— what's it?"

Tom glares from one to the other, trying to make them realize that whatever the turn of talk he is the important one. "A bet? What's 'at? Who? What? Missed it but I'll take you on. Come again —"

Forster finishes his beer, then tells them. They roar. But ordering the next round Mitchell of Ponds Wood turns quickly, "But you're not serious," he says.

Forster finds him where they had said he'd be, in the Fox, an old place dark as a cave, with one electric-globe hung like a yellow star and the stalactites are whisky and gin bottles that drip out a tot and no more. The park gates are opposite. Around the pub talk, the landlord's bolder voice as he fills up all round, very casually, as if selling drink doesn't matter, is the sound of country buses entering the town and leaving it. And Forster's man is here. He's Grose and is talking with a one-striper in the tank corps. Forster

cannot make anything of Grose's mumbling, which is not a monotone, more a sing-song in fact; but, moist-spoken, Grose splutters, spills little laughs which evaporate in huge intakes of breath; and it's a pity he can't hear because Grose is telling the soldier he was in the Big Push. He managed to capture a whole party of Huns by growling at them in some Russian he'd picked up, and although they surrendered he'd shot them just where they stood — "That's what it was like in them days, boy — no mercy, none at all." It was the biggest lie Grose knew, but he had told it so often that gone was even the secret knowledge that a thin man named Pinkerton had done it, with him just covering the men until they fell.

The soldier looked mildly interested. "Have another," Grose says, "one for the road."

But the soldier, tough-looking enough for all his youth, and perhaps not believing him after all, simply resigned to being in the Fox, to being talked at, to killing time if not Huns, says he has to be back at camp. But not in the guard-room, thank you. 'Bye, chum.

Grose is drunk. Everyone is drunk today. All the men, anyway. The women too, but not with liquor. Grose eyes the departing soldier sleepily, amiably. He'd like to say something smart; but is incapable. Forster drinks up his double and steps in. "You're Grose, I believe — Mr. Grose?"

Grose sobers himself. This stranger, a farmer. Stranger? Maybe not so strange. A sharp nose on him like old Forster of Church Gresham. His eldest? Yes, the fellow in the army, but who's always on agricultural leave. "I'm Grose, right enough," he says. "I'm your man. Grose by name 'n nature. Take it or leave it."

"You sell anything," says Forster. He looks down into the other's screwed-up worried little face, knows the man for a liar, knows that his selling is a lie, a pretense of having so much there is plenty over for others. But for all that the man's a man; with the beer in his veins Forster wants to pat him even as he seeks to hurt him.

"What are you after?" says Grose.

"Something you won't sell."

"I'll sell anything. You can't mention . . . come on . . . you can't. One man market, that's me. Let anybody have any — Come on, what's yours —"

"Not this you won't."

"Try me."

"What's yours is yours, eh? Until you sell it —"

"What of it?"

"But you won't sell your wife."

"I'll sell anything. What you say you're after? Didn't catch."

"Your wife. I want your wife."

Not a dead pause but a lively one in spite of the death between them, the cessation of contact; glasses clinking, a new barrel being tapped, beer in the barrel, in bottles, like slime on the counter, beer on lips and down, down with a gulp and a huff, dropping sheer and cold to the innards though hot in the

channels. Smell of beer and of sawdust and of smoke, and the ceiling of the dark little cave room sagging down on them.

"How much?" says Grose.

"Five quid," says Forster.

"For one possession."

"That'll do. Since this is the black market. I can't buy a wife legally. Even for one possession."

Grose is turbulent inside. And a bit afraid of his heart, which he has always felt is weak. His big moment. This, and out of the blue. Had he grasped it? Not to be knocked off balance, to play up to any mortal thing—had he played up well? He thinks, I'm an odd chap, man of character. Man of my convictions, that's what I am.

"Character," he says, "that's what I've got, Mr. Whatever Your Name Is. Man o' my convictions. Five quid for 'er, i'n't it? Call it a deal then. 'S a deal. But don't waste no time—"

"A drink on it," says Forster.

I ought to ask for the cash. Grose looks at him, frowns at him, then laughs contemptuously. But it's all airball any road. Can't see him doing it, Mr. Blowing-his-mouth-off. 'S all in fun.

"I mean it," Forster says, handing him his filled glass. "No kidding."

"Course you mean it," says Grose. "D'you think I don't? Eh?" God, help my hand from shaking.

"She's under your thumb then — won't object?"

"She's mine. She'll do what I say. Here—" Gross fumbles in his breast pocket, finds his pocket-book and scribbles something in pencil, regarding it closely and then from afar, as if the very words are out to trick him; tears out the page and puts it in a used envelope,—this'll be enough. Credentials, call it. Now give us the five quid."

"Two-ten, the rest afterwards."

A moment's hesitation, then Grose takes the notes. Forster finishes his drink. "I'm off," he says, "—business to attend to." Grose ignores him. The landlord is pretending to polish glasses but eyeing him doubtfully every now and again. Beer is heavy on Grose's stomach. He knows that he is a world in himself and that if he decides to move a step that step must be very carefully thought out, he could so easily run into disaster, with things ever so slightly afloat about him, the upturned whisky and gin bottles—*take them contraptions off an' it'll all pour out, coo that'd be a laugh for you*—all gently rocking in a pleasant elaze. But the danger—turning round and putting his back to the counter, elbows at rest, whew! Keep that door still.

After a minute he says to the landlord, "I'll *do* for the bastard." He gropes towards the door, remembers his glass still in his hand, dives back to the counter and smacks it down, heads again for the door. "Hold hard," someone says, coming in and nearly getting knocked over. "I'll *do* for him," Grose says.

He stops outside and stares. The car is still there with Forster sitting at the wheel as if trying to recover something in his mind that may be lost. But



seeing Grose he pats the seat beside him smiling cheerfully. "Delighted," he says, "to give you a lift. When'll you sell me the roof off your barn?"

Grose gets in, sinking down heavily. "What's it all about?" he says, "Where we goin'? Do I know you, Mr. What's-his-name?"

"Bought your wife," says Forster, starting up, "minute or so ago," and waves the envelope still in his right hand. "Credentials."

They keep silent through the town. Forster handles the wheel with exaggerated smoothness. The drink is only just beginning to take effect on him; it always takes some time. He feels more and more cheerful but more and more vague, with darts of uneasiness. He has been very clever, has scored off this man, this liar — what's the wretch doing in my car? But the thing achieved, whatever it was, he is conscious of palpitations around the heart; his scheme is a spider glueing him to its web, he wants to be rid of it, it irks him. "Forget it," he says, and hands Grose the envelope, "just pulling your leg, that's all. Now we'll forget it."

Grose thrusts his face near him, whispers, "I'll do for you," confidentially and with love.

"Not today."

The ferocity dies slowly from Grose's face. Why was it all so confusing? "Deal's a deal," he says, "you'll agree?"

"The Crosskeys is the next one," Forster says, "do you go there much?"

"Should have bought them three heifers off Blake," says Grose, "you'll agree? What's the good of an envelope?"

Forster laughs, thinking uneasily of two pounds ten — what sort of an ass was he? Looking vaguely across misty meadows, past a hill like a cliff covered with trees, looking right over the Shropshire plain to the blue hulk of the Wrekin. "He's got Scotch ale. Only one who's had it all through the war."

They stop at a pub just off the road, at the sign of crossed keys. Only a shabby coupe with a trailer stands outside. Both walk rather majestically into the bar. As he orders the drinks Forster is touched on the shoulder. Mitchell of Ponds Wood twitches his mouth secretively and winks. "You dogging my footsteps, Mr. Forster?" he says, and softer, "All set? I don't think!" laughing outright.

"What's the use of a bloody envelope," says Grose. "You have it," thrusting it out and Mitchell's hand happens to be there.

Mitchell looks at them both, looks even harder when he has opened the envelope and read the few words; but Forster is grinning vacantly, paying no attention, trying to focus the fish in the glass case — a lamprey, grey belly? — and Grose is dark in his own thoughts.

"One for the road?" says Forster, recollecting himself as Mitchell goes to the door.

Mitchell shakes his head. "Bit of business to attend to," he says.

# JOHN WALLER:

## Winter Harlequin

A winter gnome no winter may prevent  
Shall seize you suddenly, talon at heart  
And the limbs drowsy. You may be lost  
In the ice-cold storm taking you so quickly.

Barrie's Lob, Flecker's Ishak, all icy fauns —  
The poets felt it and became regards —  
Knew spells where feeling goes utterly blind  
Losing its way among stars on terrible stars.

A silver gleam on the stage, the spotlight hovers  
Chasing cold active flesh, legs springing outwards,  
A nonchalant smile masks danger of luring lips —  
O the lights go crazily drunk in licking him over.

He dances, you might think, upon fine strings,  
For gliding he has each skilled movement pat;  
Agile upon his toes he never sings  
But traces your droll legends with his feet.

This brave boy of the tale is always the same  
Winning princesses from peril; you may be sure  
He'll slay the dragon, the giant, with all of those  
Who hinder his generous playing. It is a game

Of magic, remember, in winter with candles and holly  
And carols accompanying loving on a frozen night.  
As you look he whirls his head, the black hair falls  
And the cold seductive eyes demand your delight.

Softly the kiss of applause will blow him away  
As the chorus enters, sweeping across the snow  
In the way he trod. And the dance is over.  
Sweet wishes follow him wherever he goes.

Now sorrow is yours who foolishly pierce the mist  
Of this fairy tale awakening. You were the hero  
Finding yourself so proudly pale in the lights  
And now in your heart the ice-cold truth is breaking.

# JOHN FREDERICK NIMS:

## In Glass: City of God

### I

Downstreet, the palmed rose  
Of windy matchfire blows.

For hours, overhead pass  
Stars like edge of glass;  
In vacant lots, by sprawl  
Of backfence, garage wall,  
Broken bottles gash  
Orions in the ash.  
Eccentric, brief, rare,  
Through exposed air  
Where sharp cables blow  
Falls one flake of snow  
Whose prisms catch  
Star, lamp, sulphur-match.

On streets, in the blown arclight  
Wider with late night,  
Like snow to a vague goal  
Floats the unsure soul:  
Half in street, half out,  
Robbed in saloon bout,  
Sailor with cut head  
Rocks from beer to bed.

In brick shadows lurk  
Rumpled typist, clerk;  
Her hips forced to wall,  
Face upturned, where small  
Sulphur kisses strike.

Mirrors are most like:—

### II

Rameau's day, suppose:  
A seigneur, his dark-rose



Silk coat shot like sun,  
 At fierce cards having won  
 Park and chateau, finds  
 (When first throwing the blinds)  
 Its gilt elegance thin—  
 He fits mirrors in.  
 The chandelier, glass storm,  
 Proliferates one form  
 And, wherever you look,  
 Explodes on a gold hook.  
 Flame's treasure, box on box,  
 Glass in one room locks.

### III

In and beneath sky  
 Nests of reflectors lie:  
 Moon, prominent, calm,  
 Round as poolball in palm;  
 Dew's retina in grass;  
 Alleys of midnight glass;  
 Snowflake, whose prisms catch  
 Red restaurant-sign and match,  
 In each of whose hundred eyes  
 The entire streetcar lies,  
 Clatters and bumps free;

And last, like snowflakes, we  
 Whose prisms in cold wire  
 Turn, jibe, flood with fire:  
 Nursery, big schoolroom pages,  
 Wars, planets, domains, ages,  
 Girl's lip in locked park,  
 Bach's ember, Donne's spark,  
 Reflections off-hue, odd  
 From the far light of God.  
 We in our tears and blood  
 Make that one candle flood  
 (Already great) world's-end;  
 Our pain to prisms bend  
 And (as flakes from night, seek night,  
 One moment arclamp-bright)

Between smashed bottles pass  
 And the sky's edge of glass.

# JACK JONES:

## All About Percival's Father

Our Percival was three and a half years old, twenty-two and one-fourth years younger than herself, his mother sometimes said, seeing something amusing in her preciseness, and transmitting this amusement to him with little difficulty. She began to introduce new ways into their play, all of which had a quality that was rather strange. The following incident may serve to characterize the trend. The porch of the house in which they lived, a white two-story apartment structure whose other tenants were in no instance under forty years of age, was four feet from the ground, about a foot higher than Percival. It was the custom for his mother to swing him over the railing, like a pendulum, sometimes lowering him to the ground and letting him drop from a height that did not usually exceed a foot. He had never yet jumped from a place higher than he himself on the ground. On this afternoon, when he climbed on the railing holding his mother's shoulder, she pushed him off. The landing was not bad, and he remained in the position he had reached as the momentum ceased, knees bent and hands on the sandy grass, until, certain that the next motion would proceed from within him, he turned his head, deflecting from the young royal palm in passing, and found his mother's face, from which the contortion of laughter was just about to relax. "Wasn't that fun?" He behaved quietly for the rest of the day, but in the afternoon of the next, feeling something change within him acceptably, he was already smiling as he climbed the rail and saw her hand dart toward him. Within ten minutes it was a routine, and one upon which it was he, not she, who insisted. One curious derivation should be mentioned. As it was no longer possible for his mother to catch him off guard at the rail, so whatever she might have intended, when approaching any height, of steps or a street curb, he would attempt to drop behind her, with a suspecting smile. Then there was the affair of the balloons. Percival was born during the rubber shortage (there is no intention to imply any connection between these facts — it was a defect in the material, not a lack of the same.) Balloons were no longer around; Percival had not had any experience with them. One morning his mother returned from marketing with a box of them, colored with the war drabness. She blew up several for him, and returning an hour later, found all three intact, having been treated with a reverence and caution which in one of so tender an age was rather comic, though also, to be sure, touching. She told him how to blow up balloons, and it was not long before he was doing so. One of the balloons had reached the size which to the initiated eye would seem the largest advisable, and she encouraged him to keep on blowing. The explosion left him with a few shreds of rubber scattered by the blast, one of which was shot into his mother's mouth. She spat it out, but did not resume the attitude which had been a preparation for laughter. The incident involving the scissors should

neither be overlooked. From the apartment above, with the windows of theirs also open, sometimes came, besides sounds of other interest, curses and obscenities, which Percival's mother would listen to, telling him to be quiet. Percival had a tendency to repeat some of these overhead words, indifferently, in spite of having been warned by his mother not to do so, because she did not wish the persons above to perhaps realize that they were overheard and deprive her of the interesting moments which could not fail to brighten up any day. Finally she threatened to cut his tongue off, unless. About a week later, he used one of the words with intention to impress a goldfish. She procured the scissors and pinned him down on the couch, compelling him to open his mouth. As he did not really believe she could do without his tongue, he felt the snip of warm steel with a cry and lunged away, feeling in his mouth. His fingers were stained with blood. With what embarrassment, it may be imagined, did she explain that she had only meant to frighten him.

At seven the next morning, they were standing behind the house, in the service yard, while she was washing some sheets. A sanitation truck drove up, and began to remove the garbage pails from the buildings on the block. He ran over to watch them work, moving with them until they reached his building, where his mother was standing. He began to play with an empty garbage can beside her. She lifted him into it. He was not quite able to get out. The Negroes having emptied every other can, began to climb back into the truck. "Stop! Take this." They looked at her obliquely. She pulled her dress above her knee. All the Negroes looked away, but not at each other. She removed a bill from her stocking and gave it to the one in charge, smiling as if to white men. "I want to get rid of him, he's no good to me." The Negroes began to laugh, whether just after or just before Percival began to cry was not certain. "She wants to get rid of him," the tallest Negro said (not the one in charge, who was slowly folding the five dollars.) "She wants to get rid of him," another Negro said (not the one in charge, who was just looking up.) She whispered into the latter's ear; her lips touched his lobe and he flinched. "Yes, mam. Thank you, mam," he said. They lifted the can containing Percival and placed it upon the truck. Abandoning the rest of the route, they drove rapidly under the postcard aircscape, two hours after a Florida dawn. Percival was trying to upset the can. They replaced the top, hammering it tightly into place, and stuck a few holes with a screwdriver. At the city dump, they rolled the can off, and returned to public duties.

About the can were piled the rotten rinds of oranges, grapefruit, tangerines and bananas. The dump was on a lot two hundred yards square. With his head Percival butted the lid of the can off before noon; lying with his head outside, he went to sleep. When he awoke it was late afternoon, and he crawled all the way out. He ate part of an orange he found lying near. He sat propped against the can, watching the cats and rats looking for each other, tense maneuvers in three dimensions through piles of decay. In deepest twilight, across the field, their blue coupe stopped under a street lamp. A flashlight gasped, advancing erratically. About forty-five minutes later he was dazzled, and heard his mother's voice. "Percival, Percival!" she said. "Those men made a horrible mistake!"



## FRANCIS FERGUSSON:

ROBINSON JEFFERS: *Medea, Freely Adapted from the Medea of Euripides*. Random House.

The first thing to be said about Mr. Jeffers' new play is that it is much the most readable, and probably the most actable, version of *Medea* that we have in English. It is also the best Jeffers I have seen. His other long works, in spite of their violent themes and their occasional hysterical passages, are likely to be prosy and verbose, as though neither the feelings nor the metaphysics of the author had been quite digested. His *Medea* is more musical in conception; it relies less on the strength of the author's own feelings and more on the authority of his vision and the accuracy of his craftsmanship. In short, it is better poetry, and has far more of the power of poetry, than any other work of his I know.

Perhaps this is partly because he is working so closely with Euripides' great theme. Mr. Jeffers has of course used Greek myths before, but he has "made them his own" so literally that their more impersonal import was lost. In this play he follows the outlines of Euripides' tragedy very closely; and he is thinking always of the stage, and of a particular performer, Miss Judith Anderson, for whom the work was written. Euripides' story, the stage, and Miss Anderson's particular theatrical talent seem to have imposed strict limitations upon Mr. Jeffers' freedom of expression; and these limitations are of the essence of the basically public medium of poetic drama, which appears to flourish best when based on traditional themes and the living style of particular performers.

Having said so much, there is still the question of how Euripides' drama fares in Mr. Jeffers' version, and the question of Mr. Jeffers' handling of the modern stage. As for Euripides, it is notoriously difficult to get at him, through the veil of the Greek and the encumbrances of the available translations. As for the modern stage, it has baffled Joyce, Eliot, and Yeats; only Mr. Woolcott Gibbs, Mr. Lewis Nichols, and Mr. Burton Rascoe dare pronounce upon it with any authority, and the Greeks are undreamed of in their philosophy. Thus the problem of bringing Euripides and the modern stage — two unknowns — together is an unsolved problem, and the temptation (since the field is vacant) is to take Mr. Jeffers' attempt as final. If Miss Anderson succeeds as *Medea* we shall have our modern version of Euripides on the stage. In the meantime one can only try to see how Mr. Jeffers has proceeded.

If one thinks of the modern stage as being the theatre of Mr. Philip Barry, Miss Lillian Hellman, Mr. Maxwell Anderson, and Mr. S. N. Behrman — the "better Broadway" playwrights — it is obvious that we cannot have much of Euripides on our stage. The taxi trade (which has superseded the carriage trade) supports Broadway, and it can see the drama of human life only through the cynical-soothing eyes of headwaiters and advertising men, or with the second-hand liberalism of the emancipated columnists. Mr. Jeffers has attempted to by-pass this standard commercial theatre, and to found his theatricality upon one good performer, Miss Anderson. Miss Anderson is not a Broadway product, and does not fit into its categories. She has given interesting performances for a number of years — in *Behold the Bridegroom*, in Pirandello, as Gertrude in the Gielgud *Hamlet*, and more recently a slightly pathological interpretation of Lady Macbeth in Margaret Webster's unsatisfactory production. She is an actress of power and imagination, who has seldom had the benefit of good directing or an adequate acting ensemble to play with. Like the late Alla Nazimova, she has a special understanding of the tormented heroines who dominated the stage before the First World War — the kind which fascinated Andreev, Strindberg, and Ibsen before them. There is a kinship which has often been pointed out between Euripides and the despairing moderns, and there is a kinship between Hedda Gabler, or Rita in *Little Eyolf*, or Rebecca West with her dangerous power, and Euripides' *Medea*. If Mr. Jeffers was looking for a modern parallel I don't see how he

could have done better than to start with a fine actress in the tradition of these half-mad heroines of the Pre-War generations.

Mr. Jeffers follows closely Euripides' unfolding of the story, but he reduces Euripides' ritual form to a naturalistic level, to make it acceptable to a contemporary audience, and to create a role for Miss Anderson. His *Medea* does not feel like a grand-daughter of the Sun; and her evil magic taps Freudian rather than cosmic sources of power. She does not appear at the end in a dragon car (Euripides' epiphany of evil, or of outraged female fertility) but between two flaming lamps, which can be explained chemically. For Euripides' formal choruses Mr. Jeffers substitutes several Corinthian women, who speak in a kind of verse which is as close to prose as that of the other characters. He has also broken up the formality of Euripides' *agons* or dialogues, in the effort, I suppose, to make *Medea's* psychology clear and to find an easier form for modern actors. It is in some of these dialogues, or disputes, that Mr. Jeffers' dramaturgy seems to me to be weakest. In Euripides, the *agons* owe much of their power to their perfection of form; Mr. Jeffers demands that the actress carry the whole effect by means of her personal glamor and psychological interest of her characterization. There is no doubt that Mr. Jeffers has not found contemporary "equivalents" for many of Euripides' formal beauties. But he seems to have renounced this attempt in advance, working only with the best theatrical means at his disposal.

It seems to me that Euripides' *Medea* suffers much less by this naturalistic reduction than one of Sophocles' masterpieces would have done. As Professor Gilbert Murray has pointed out, Euripides uses or restores the ritual forms — Prologue, Agon, Pathos, Epiphany and the rest — much more literally than Sophocles does. But he lacks Sophocles' moral and religious insight into their meaning; for Euripides they are theatrically effective devices, rather than the shape of the rhythm of human life itself. Euripides' *Medea*, indeed, in spite of its traditional form, is already modern in spirit; and he was himself (compared with Sophocles) more interested in picturesque characters, in the iniquities of tyrants, in the anarchical cruelty of fate, than he was in adumbrating an underlying unity of human life, or of drama. He has neither the lyrical and subjective singleness of Wagnerian drama (the luxury of running down a steep place into the sea) nor the humane and religious unity of vision, based on acceptance, which Sophocles has at his best; he is pitying, sometimes to the verge of sentimentality, and rebellious with a demoniac pride. Mr. Jeffers has, I think, been true to this Euripidean spirit. If he has not been able to indicate the formal beauties of Greek dramaturgy, that is partly the fault of the modern stage: at least he has presented a character with theatrical power, in language more carefully considered than we are used to on the stage — more, in short, of Euripides' *Medea* than anyone else has ever done.

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LOUIS ARAGON is known in America by translations of *The Bells of Basle* and other novels and by the recent *Aragon: Poet of the French Resistance*, edited by Malcolm Cowley and Hannal Josephson.

BERTOLT BRECHT, the German dramatist now living in America, is the foremost exponent of "epic theatre" (see Eric Bentley's "What Is Epic Theatre?" in *ACCENT*, Winter 1946).

FRANCIS FERGUSON of Bennington College is a noted director and translator and has contributed criticism to *Hound and Horn*, *Kenyon Review*, etc.

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JACK JONES of Jackson Heights, Long Island, has appeared in *New Directions*, *Politics*, and *ACCENT*.

REGINALD MOORE is a young British writer, editor of the annual *Modern Writing*.

PABLO NERUDA of Chile has achieved the widest reputation of Latin-American poets of our time.

JOHN FREDERICK NIMS has returned to the Notre Dame faculty after a year of teaching in Canada. A collection of his poems will appear in 1947.

BORIS PASTERNAK is among the most eminent contemporary Russian authors.

JOHN WALLER is a young British poet whose first collection, *Crusade*, was published last spring by Macmillan.

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